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METHODISM
HAS A
MESSAGE

PAUL B. KERN

An Abingdon-Cokesbury Good Book

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Methodism Has a Message!

BOOKS BY PAUL B. KERN

METHODISM HAS A MESSAGE!

THE BASIC BELIEFS OF JESUS

THE MIRACLE OF THE GALILEAN

Methodism Has a Message!

THE JARRELL LECTURES FOR 1941
AT EMORY UNIVERSITY

By

PAUL B. KERN

A Bishop of The Methodist Church



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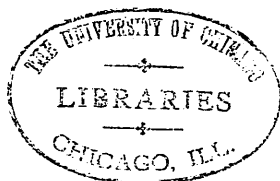
METHODISM HAS A MESSAGE!

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Foreword

THE UNION OF THE THREE LEADING COMMUNIONS bearing witness to the Wesleyan tradition was an event of world-wide significance. In addition to being the most spectacular step toward Christian unity since the days of the apostles, it brought together into one fold the largest Protestant denomination on earth. From some angles we are stunned by the magnitude of our new church. But in our moments of sober reflection we know that there must be a message that will meet God's expectation of us. The united voice of American Methodism will be heard if it has anything deeply fundamental to say to the hearts of men.

The creative theme upon which this series of lectures is built is the correspondence discoverable between the original emphases of the early Methodist movement and the conscious spiritual needs of this present hour. It is an effort to show that the Wesleyan interpretation of religious truth and its approach to the problem of making the eighteenth century Christian is deeply suggestive for Methodism in this moment of her new birth. If we discover that Methodism does have a message for this generation, we may also discover that this message has its genesis not in some new and modern discovery but in an ancient truth made

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vital and compelling by John Wesley. We may face our task today with the momentum of two hundred years of evangelical continuity behind us. The study is both historical and currently interpretative. Our task is not slavishly to imitate our fathers, but rather to discover for our generation those secrets of divine power which make the message of eternal life acceptable and accepted in every century.

Does Methodism have the message for which our world wistfully waits? This is the disturbing question which confronts every honest and responsive spirit in this brave new church of ours. I believe, in all humility, that she does, and I have in these chapters sought to sound a trumpet call to the host of united Methodism. There slumbers in the heart of this great church a fire that needs only a divine spark to set it blazing with light and power in this dark and disconsolate time. Cannot our hearts once again be "strangely warmed"?

PAUL B. KERN.

*Episcopal Residence
Nashville, Tennessee*

To

JOHN M. MOORE

An Elder Brother in the Ministry
A Colleague in the Episcopacy
A Statesman in United Methodism

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I

The Authority of Religious Experience

THE STORY OF THE SPIRITUAL PILGRIMAGE OF JOHN Wesley from doubt to certainty is a classic in the field of Christian literature and life. A cleric of the Church of England, with an unusual background of religious training, and undoubted marks of intellectual and moral strength, finds himself, after a few futile years, discouraged by his spiritual impotence. His whole inner world is in confusion. Peter Böhler, the Moravian, had held before him an ideal of personal holiness unto which he could not attain and which almost threw him into spiritual desperation. The perfunctory round of religious duties in Georgia had left both his parishioners and himself without any comforting assurance of salvation, and upon returning he capitally doubts whether he is even a converted man. One sometimes wonders if his trip to America was not decided upon in an effort to win by the hard way of sacrifice what he had missed along the smooth and pleasant road of theological inquiry and searching. The scholar had not yet brought every thought into

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captivity to the Lord Jesus Christ. The ecclesiastic was overshadowing the saint.

Then comes the epochal experience at Aldersgate. What happened has about it many elements that might have been foreseen, but much of it was utterly unpredictable. He went unwillingly; there was little of inspirational uplift in a layman's reading of Luther's introduction to the Epistle to the Romans; Wesley himself seems on the particular night not to have been consciously seeking a blessing from the Lord. But with transforming power and radiance the spirit of the Lord came down upon him and the glory of the Lord shone round about him. The miracle of grace took place in his heart. From darkness and doubt he embraced conviction and confidence; from spiritual languor he rose to unbelievable vigor and earnestness.

The whole experience is extremely personal. It lifted religion out of the realm of theory and landed it squarely in the realm of realism. He no longer coveted the certainty of other men's assurance; he had the light in his own soul. The witness of the Spirit, for which he had vainly yearned, suddenly became his happy possession. "I felt *my* heart strangely warmed. I felt I did trust in Christ . . . an assurance was given *me* that he had taken away *my* sins, even

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mine and saved *me* from the law of sin and death.” “*I, me, mine; strangely warmed, trust, saved, assurance, law.*” Here is the verbal framework of a revolutionary personal transformation. It is not our purpose to enter into the discussion, so rife in later years, as to the exact theological and psychological character of this Aldersgate event in Wesley’s life. For us it will suffice to survey its larger and more suggestive outlines as they bear upon the experiential character of his message and ministry.

This experience of salvation and the witness of the Spirit was a startling phenomenon in the religious life of the early eighteenth century. The Church was the subject of widespread ridicule, and the English people had a cool indifference to religion. Nothing was more taboo in respectable circles than “enthusiasm.” Early Methodism was scorned because its adherents exhibited some feeling in their religious joy. In the public mind such exhibitions were only one step removed from fanaticism. Deism was the current vogue in theological thought. God dwelt apart in remote and august splendor; he was the unapproachable Other. Christianity was little more than natural religion, encumbered with miracles and a touch of supernaturalism. It presented men with a system of morality but supplied no power by which its ethical ideals could be

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reached or sustained. Very few people looked upon religion with any seriousness, and even the clergy themselves managed to keep their enthusiasms well within the bounds of a rather frigid respectability.

No devotional book in Wesley's day was in greater favor than Jeremy Taylor's *Holy Living and Holy Dying*. This volume represents the best type of Anglican piety of the day. Look at this passage, more or less characteristic of the tenor of the volume:

No man is to reckon his pardon immediately upon his returns from sin to the beginnings of a good life, but is to begin his hopes and degrees of confidence according as sin dies in him, and grace lives, as the habits of sin lessen, and righteousness grows. . . . For we must know that God pardons our sins by part; as our duty increases, and our care is more prudent and active, so God's anger decreases. . . . And whether God hath forgiven us or no, we know not, and how far we know not, and all that we have done is not of sufficient worth to obtain pardon; therefore still pray, and still be sorrowful for having done it, and for ever watch against it; and then those beginnings of pardon which are working in all the way, will at last be perfected in the day of the Lord.¹

In other words, one may not know God's pardoning grace, but only hope through living a righteous life

¹ IX. viii. 9.

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that some day God will be willing to pardon one's sins. This tantalizing scheme of progressive, legalistic salvation seemed the best the Church had to offer a penitent sinner. Hence when a Methodist claimed this sense of sins forgiven, he was guilty of sheer presumption. Wesley wrote in his *Journal* under date of June 25, 1745, when a Methodist had actually been thrown into prison on account of his religion:

I asked a little gentleman at St. Just what objection there was to Edward Greenfield. He said, "Why, the man is well enough in other things; but his impudence the gentlemen cannot bear. Why, sir, he says he knows his sins are forgiven!"

Bishop Butler, the greatest Christian thinker of the age, was much of the same mind as the "little gentleman" at St. Just. When Wesley was at Bristol in 1739 and had an interview with him, after saying that "men were justified on account of some moral goodness in them," and that "faith itself is a good work; it is a virtuous temper of mind," Butler went on to say, "Sir, the pretending to extraordinary revelations and gifts of the Holy Ghost is a horrid thing—a very horrid thing!" No wonder the bishop finally said to Wesley, "You have no business here; you are not commissioned to preach in this diocese. Therefore I advise you to go hence."

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It is pathetic to remember that when Bishop Butler was dying he said to his chaplain, "Though I have endeavoured to avoid sin, and to please God to the utmost of my power, yet from consciousness of perpetual infirmities, I am still afraid to die." The chaplain said, "My lord, you have forgotten that Jesus Christ is a Saviour." "True," said Butler, "but how shall I know that he is a Saviour for me?" "My lord," the chaplain said, "it is written, Him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out." "True," said the dying prelate, "and I am surprised that though I have read that scripture I suppose a thousand times over, I never felt its virtue till this moment. And now I die happy." Here is a pathetic and startling contrast between the sunlit certainty of Wesley's experience and the shadowed insecurity of a bishop's soul who could theologically prove the existence of God by analogies from nature but who knew him not in the peace of an inward, mystical, and redeeming fellowship.

Men have been from the earliest beginnings on a trail that they hoped would lead to the reality of God and a sound and secure basis of certainty in the universe. No ground can be proved in the materialistic foundation of the physical structure, nor are we any nearer the truth in seeking for it in the fact of consciousness or the solitary individual self. We are

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driven to religion. Within the compass of what William James designates as religion we shall find our quest answered. "Religion shall mean for us the feelings, acts, and experiences of individual men so far as they apprehend themselves to stand in relation to whatever they may consider the Divine."² But religion is not the same to all men, and even within its sanctuaries there have been many altars at which devout religious believers have claimed to find certainty. For some it has been the Church. For such the Church and the Truth are one. When the Church speaks all argument ceases. Cardinal Newman said, "From the time I became [Roman] Catholic, of course I had no further history of my religious experience to narrate."³ The voice of the soul is submerged into respectful silence by the voice of the Church. This basis for certainty most men have long since discarded. To think creatively up to the door of religion and then abandon all such processes in obedience to a supposedly infallible external authority is to be guilty of a dualism that is the betrayal of the free mind.

The Protestant, driven by this same urge to find a foundation for unshaken faith, turns to the authority of a Book. Has not God spoken in his Word, and

² *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, Lecture 2, p. 31.

³ *Apologia pro vita mea*, p. 373.

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what further search need man make for the final answer? Here again we stumble because we do not have the record as God spoke it, nor do the situations in which we must apply his commandment coincide with those that called forth the precept or principle found in the Scriptures. For many trained in the sound science of historical criticism there is no ultimate and final authority that can be here adduced. The Scriptures are the writings of holy men who knew God and told the story of their discovery of him. They did not presume to give men an arbitrary rule or mandate that would make unnecessary the pilgrimage along which they themselves had climbed to God. The Spirit will lead us into the Truth, but he will not compel us. He is our guide, not our dictator.

The Renaissance brought into the world a heightened sense of inquiry. Men were tired of complacent traditionalisms; and the stir of new cultures, continents, and methods of thinking was in the air. Bacon in his *Novum Organum* embodied this new spirit. "Men have hitherto dwelt but little, or rather have only slightly touched, upon *experience*, whilst they have wasted much time on theories and the fictions of the imagination." The inductive, or experimental method became the successor to the idea of dogmatic assumptions. In the laboratory men reached truth

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by experiment conducted without binding presuppositions, and the experimental method became the rule. Later under Descartes and Kant the revolutionary shift from dogmatism to experience took place, and finally theology under Schleiermacher took its stand upon religious experience as the valid authority in the moral world. Now John Wesley had come by the aid of his honest, realistic mind to a conclusion strangely in line with this historical development. In religion he definitely shifted the center from tradition to experience. As one of his keenest interpreters said, "Methodism did, by a spiritual intuition, what Schleiermacher did consciously and constructively nearly a century later."⁴ Here these plain Methodist believers caught up the genius of the Protestant Reformation and reinterpreted in their own day and their own way the principles that drove Luther from Catholicism and that inaugurated the era of salvation by grace through faith. The simple quatrain of Charles Wesley, so often on the lips of early Methodists, was more than a hymn; it was a testimony of the deepest reality they knew.

What we have felt and seen
With confidence we tell,
And publish to the sons of men
The signs infallible.

⁴ Bett, *The Spirit of Methodism*, p. 144.

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If this emphasis upon experience as the central authority in life seems to play into the hands of those who contend that Methodism was too individualistic, let it be clearly perceived that the last and irrefutable reality in the universe is an individual. Strictly speaking there is no such thing as a collective mind apart from the minds that compose the group. But an individual sense of reality is not emotionalized fiction; it has its roots in certain spiritual and historical facts that can be clearly discerned. Dr. R. N. Flew, the British theologian, has related these experience-realities in early Methodism to an illuminating analysis:

Experience means consciousness, and consciousness can only be real in individuals, and the appeal to experience means, of course, an appeal to consciousness of God which individuals enjoy. But not only was the individual's apprehension of God to be tested in fellowship and verified by the moral conduct of daily life, their experience was based on the objective facts of an historical revelation. There were three stages in the process of revelation, in the Christian sense of the word, if we may analyze what is implicit in their own accounts. First, there is one historical figure, the Perfect Revelation of God, Jesus in His Life and Death. Secondly, there is Revelation in the continuation of the work of Jesus, in the religious consciousness of the primitive Church, the experience which the New Testament calls the Spirit. And thirdly, there is Revelation as it is appropriated and made real and vivid in the daily

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consciousness of the individual Methodist himself, in mind and heart and conscience.⁵

The meaning of all this is far reaching. It has historical significance of the first order, and it has spiritual connotations which bear definitely upon Methodism's place and message in the modern world. Dr. George Croft Cell has cited two modern voices that are lifted, from widely separated areas, to proclaim the soundness and vitality of that which early Methodism so ardently insisted upon. The first is a Congregational minister, Dr. George A. Gordon, in his famous Old South Church, Boston, pulpit in 1925. These are his words:

Let it be said once for all that Wesley brought the whole Christian world back to religion as experience in the face of a dead theology and of a dead ceremony; he made religion a living, creative, glorious reality, and the thought and determination and affirmation of Wesley have gone round the world.⁶

The other voice is even more modern and comes from a brilliant young priest of the Roman Catholic Church in Belgium, Father Maximin Piette:

On all sides Methodism from a doctrinal point of view occupies in every way a unique position, by reason of the

⁵ *The Idea of Perfection in Christian Theology*, pp. 316 f. By permission of the publishers, Oxford University Press.

⁶ Quoted in Cell, *The Rediscovery of John Wesley*, p. 73.

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primacy which it has accorded to religious experience; it is a reaction against the antinomianism of the Lutherans; it is a reaction against the absolute decrees of Calvinism; it is a realization of free research within the limits of a single powerful organization of discipline. It is a forerunner in theology of Schleiermacher's theory of religion.⁷

He further observes that the Wesleyan theology of experience "has exerted an uncontestable influence upon the theories of liberal Protestant theology from Friedrich Schleiermacher to William James." He might also have conceivably added that Wesley brought the whole Christian world back to religion as experience, and experience as the final authority in religion. The appeal to experience is the generic idea of Methodism.

What is the bearing of this emphasis upon experience in Wesleyan preaching upon Methodism's message today? How does the mood and temper of this generation react to the doctrine of experience as the core and heart of religious reality? I think we have discovered that the steady drift in men's thinking is toward the inductive, experimental method of arriving at the truth. The dogmatic approach is unacceptable. The old ancient authorities in which men rested are judged inadequate for the security of the

⁷ *La réaction de John Wesley dans l'évolution du Protestantisme*, Preface. Quoted *ibid.*, p. 75.

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human spirit. Hugh Price Hughes used to insist that the final choice in religion is between Catholicism and Methodism, between an authoritative, dogmatic process and a full experiential discovery by each man of truth. Is reality to be accepted, handed down, predetermined; or is it to be inward, experimental, warmly personal? Methodism's answer to this is fortified by all the developments of historical criticism and of inductive reasoning. The Kingdom of God is within: it is a search and a revelation that belongs at last to every true child of God who turns his face to the Light.

This conflict presses on us from many angles today. It is the major issue of this hour. The battle is on everywhere between the regimented, controlled, dogmatic approach of the totalitarian state and the free, disciplined liberty that belongs to the individual in a true democracy. In Germany the individual does not count in the scale against the state. In a democratic philosophy of life the state exists for the individuals that compose it and no state is worth preserving that enslaves its citizens in obedience to its autocratic authority. It is only a step from authoritarianism in religion to totalitarianism in government, and vice versa. The battle to preserve our free institutions, such as freedom of speech, of the press, of assembly,

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of conscience, is a more fundamental issue than the preservation of the present political hegemonies. "Ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free." If ever these words rang out with pertinence and searching suggestiveness, it is today. To undergird the inviolate liberties of the human personality with security and creative strength is humanity's supreme issue and task today.

In this battle Methodism takes her place. She is by historic tradition the foe of conventionalized morality or of dead ecclesiastical dictatorship. Her doctrine of the dignity and worth of the human heart, of the incontestable values inherent in common men and women, is a denial of every philosophy that is built on mass regimentation or servility to prideful puppets. The human spirit must be free to seek happiness, to pursue truth, to quest for God.

I have said that Methodism has a message. That message is rooted in her doctrinal history and her long and effective emphasis upon the inward witness. It is no quick adjustment to a passing clamor or a modern mood. The fact is, our present-day thought is a late overtaking of the dominant note in early Methodist preaching. Our fathers in the faith were blazing a trail that has now become a beaten path in which psychologists, philosophers, religionists, and scientists

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alike are only too glad to be found walking. There is momentum, therefore, in our voice, and there is the steadying assurance that our gospel today is no cheap gesture for public applause, but has behind it the strength of all those liberated spirits that guard the holy sanctities of men's inner shrines and refuse the thralldom of overlords and authoritarians in church or state.

Methodism can ill afford to surrender this, her original and essential message. Much has transpired since those early days when Methodist preachers and laymen presented to imprisoned souls in England the liberating grace of God, and men and women testified of a strange new peace which suffused their whole natures with a heavenly light. "I had the witness in myself that He had made an end of sin and taken my whole heart forever." So testified a typical believer, and from that day to this within the borders of a wideflung Methodism there have always been the redeemed of the Lord who "have never lost the witness." They have spoken many languages, but each in his own tongue has declared the mighty works of God and confessed to a Pentecostal experience of divine grace within and a "heart from sin set free."

There is widespread belief today that Methodism needs to recapture the strength of her ancient strong-

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holds. She needs to re-examine the weapons in her spiritual armory. She needs to evaluate some of her modern techniques against the ancient power of emphases which she has been willing too long to leave unexplored and unspoken. Certain conditions in our modern world have thrown disparagement upon a good deal of our gospel and left us at times with a sense of impotency and lack of confidence that never characterized the preaching of earlier periods of Methodism's history. We do not seem to be producing the same type and quality of religious sainthood that was so often found in earlier days. The integrity of that early emphasis on experience is grounded in the sound and indisputable facts of human nature. This spiritual experience is native to the genius of Methodism and if compared with the New Testament doctrine as interpreted by St. Paul (Romans 8:14-17; I Corinthians 3:16; 6:19) it will be found that both are established upon the same psychological basis: an intuitive element in conversion, interpreted in the light of the gospel of Jesus Christ. This basis of reality is attested in every field of knowledge. It must not disappear from Methodist preaching or we shall find ourselves missing the open road to the heart of this generation.

If we seek for the cause of this diminishing em-

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phasis upon experience in much of our modern preaching we may find it in one or more of the following explanations. There is a dead level of spiritual mediocrity about a great many congregations to which we preach. The result reacts on the cause, and the cause produces the result. The very congregation that most needs a deep transforming evangelical note is the last to inspire the man in the pulpit to preach that kind of message to it. The reciprocal effect of the pew upon the pulpit has often been disastrous, and the spiritual quality of the preacher's emphasis has been stifled by the very air which he breathes. Dr. S. Parkes Cadman, sensing this atmospheric difficulty of modern preaching, declared: "Could this congealed, static mass of humanity be refused by the fires of a consuming religious passion, melting it into new penitence and intensity of devotion, the indifference which saps pulpit authority would largely disappear."

This baffling conspiracy between the secularized mind of the modern listener, undisturbed by high ideals and indifferent to lofty spiritual imperatives, and the decorous and unevangelical message in the pulpit must be broken. If the pew should take heed how it hears, surely also the pulpit must take heed how it speaks. No truly great preaching is an echo of the world's clamor; it is rather a crying in the wil-

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derness of men's inner confusions, prepare ye the way of the Lord. But awareness by the pastor of an audience that would be on the Sabbath inwardly eager for the deeper mysteries of the faith would inspire many a discouraged preacher to drop his plummet deeper into the wells of God. One of Wesley's early correspondents wrote quaintly: "We find great power from the Lord in our private band, the Love of God shed abroad in our hearts, our souls knit to one another, we drink of one Spirit and the Lord doth meet with us, and that it is no wonder we are loth to part for we think four hours too little time for so heavenly a communion." Well, contrast with that the mental attitude of the modern congregation which likes its preacher because "he always lets us out by twelve o'clock." Verily, such listeners have their reward, but it is not soul-stirring, life-changing preaching.

Perhaps we preachers might press the inquiry closer home to where we live. Mayhap we ourselves are children of a generation which is stranger in its very soul to this deeper experience of God. We shall hardly preach what we have ourselves not felt and known. When we read the lives of those early Methodist preachers, we discover an elemental quality about their attitudes and beliefs that may have been pro-

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duced in part by the austerities of the world in which they lived. Those were days of physical danger, of unraveled mysteries of nature, of cosmic groanings precedent to social and political revolutions. They were set in a heroic and dangerous pattern of life. Theirs was a world of absolutes. Sin and salvation, time and eternity, evil and good, perdition and redemption, freedom of choice, inexorableness of destiny—these were the grand alternatives, the Everlasting Yeas and the Everlasting Noes that confronted our fathers. For us the world is less rigid, and the yawning chasms that faced men with destiny-laden decisions have been bridged by comfortable compromises that assure us that life is made up of good and bad, light and dark, and it doesn't matter so much where we are as which way we are going.

The pulpit today needs a new grip on God. It lacks awareness of the sovereignty of the Eternal over all life. Its wells are too shallow. Its ropes are too short. We who stand in the pulpit need to come before our people as men who have been with God in the sanctuary of our own souls. If the cisterns of our knowledge of God are dried up by the parching winds of secularized living, we shall offer no water of life to men. There must be something of the old abandon that sent our predecessors into the enchanted wilder-

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ness, hazarding their lives for the gospel's sake and making them restless and unresting until men should share with them the wonders of His love and feel His cleansing touch upon their liberated souls. A theologically shallow-minded ministry that knows nothing of vicarious suffering for unsaved men will neither know the joys of a real experience of grace nor be able to mediate God in Christ to a lost world.

This tendency that we have noted to lay less emphasis upon experience in preaching may be due to a prevalent attitude of depreciation of the individual in our modern world. As our group consciousness grows the importance of the individual tends to lessen. Social solidarity can be achieved only with great difficulty without sacrificing some values that belong to men as individuals, as separate personalities within the mass. Hence group or mass psychology overwhelms the significance of any personal reaction, and "the individual withers and the group is more and more." I was told in Germany before the war that no German youth was interested in personal salvation. His primary and almost sole concern was for the redemption of the state. There was something obnoxious about being free and happy while the Fatherland was in economic and political bondage. So today men minimize their own personal adjustments to God

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because of their absorption in the social maladjustment which they witness, and from which they often suffer. This makes it so much easier to preach a social gospel rather than an individual gospel, to try to save the group rather than the persons that comprise the group, to discuss a new heaven and a new earth, rather than a new heart and a new birth. I am not here depreciating the social message. I am only suggesting that it must be balanced in our preaching by an appeal to the individual without whom there would be no group. We cannot hide the nakedness of our souls by losing ourselves in the crowd, and at last we travel alone that road that leads alike to a hall of judgment and a throne of grace. We need again the piercing thrust that makes a man cry out, "What must I do to be saved?"

And, finally, we have been unduly sensitive about feeling in religion. Our modern world has immured itself against individual emotion on one hand and has given free rein to the wildest orgies of mass emotion on the other hand. It is indecorous to show feeling in the presence of deep sorrow or the overwhelming sense of the presence of God, but quite proper to throw your hat in the air and yell when the tailback on the football team grabs a pass and runs forty yards for a touchdown, or to weep when the movie actress

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is deserted by her amorous lover and left to her lonely and ill-deserved fate. Feeling is a legitimate part of all deep elemental experiences in life, and is a constituent factor in every valued judgment of the human personality. It has its place in life, and to disparage it is to subject our normal living to the loss of beauty and tenderness and to rob human love of its enthralling charm and its divinely creative power. We are not all mind and will and cold reason. These natures of ours are warmed and lighted by the glow of emotion, and God has put it there because without it we should be blind in all our seeing and powerless to obey the behests of our calculating wills.

If e'er when faith had fall'n asleep,
I heard a voice, "believe no more,"
And heard an ever-breaking shore
That tumbled in the Godless deep,

A warmth within the breast would melt
The freezing reason's colder part,
And like a man in wrath the heart
Stood up and answer'd, "I have felt." ⁸

The plea is not for overwrought emotionalism but is a straightforward insistence that the great realities of the Christian faith, the facts of the Christian revela-

⁸ Tennyson, "In Memoriam, cxxiv.

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tion, must be expected, when properly presented, to awaken in the hearer deep and moving emotional responses. These profound truths are centered in a God whose love was uncalculating and divinely profligate, in a Redeemer whose warm, loving heart was broken on the rock of our indifference and sin, of a God who so loves us that he will not leave us disconsolate and alone, but sent unto us the Comforter who through all our childish wanderings follows us with importunate and unyielding love. It must be a shallow nature that can stand in the presence of these manifestations of God's dealings with us and remain unmoved. To feel the upwelling of a deep emotional response, to shed a tear over our sins, to cry aloud in the presence of His pleading, "I yield, I yield!" seems not the degradation but the exaltation of these human natures of ours. Man is never higher than when he kneels in the presence of God and never more rational than when he cries out of a spirit suffused with deep feeling,

My life, my all, I give to thee,
Jesus, thou Lamb of Calvary.

Experience is the hallmark of Methodist doctrine. Around it gather all the glories of our history. The world today needs and seeks a new experience of God's

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indwelling presence and power. His people called Methodists must guard the sacred fire and lead this generation to an intimate and personal knowledge of his saving grace. For this generation of ours needs to be delivered from itself, to be rescued from its superficial external judgments, to be plunged into the deeps where in the chastened emotion of religious experience it may once again discover the road toward ultimate reality and see a cross standing on a hill which is the soul and secret of this mysterious universe.

Methodism knows these roads. Over them the unwearied feet of her saints and sinners have trod. In the emotional experience of God in the soul our fathers found the surest foundation of their faith and of their preaching. They send us today, as their successors, along the same highway, telling men that God is the secret, that Christ is the answer. When the mists of our strange self-delusion have all been blown away by the winds of God, we shall be left looking wistfully into His face who is the way, the truth, and the life.

Methodism does have a message here at the very central tribunal of life. Out of all the unheralded experiences of God in the hearts of her humble multitudes she stands today to say to men everywhere: This is true religion, to know God and Jesus Christ whom he hath sent. You will find no satisfaction in ethical

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moralties, in philosophical humanisms, in fleshly materialism. The world will be real only when Christ is at its center; life will be rich only as it is an expression of his will; the kingdoms for which men struggle and die will pass in blood and tears until they are built upon those everlasting foundations which are laid in his eternal purpose, namely, truth and justice, righteousness and peace.

Methodism, strike once more upon that ancient chord of the knowledge of God in the soul, the everlasting secret of your joy and power; and let the winds of God blow again as of yore the words of hope to a broken world, calling men to repentance and to a fresh adventure with the ever-living Christ who awaits with importunate yearning that call from his modern disciples.

II

The Church of the Living God

MR. WESLEY WAS DISTINCTLY A CHURCHMAN. MANY of his attitudes indicate that he was, in fact, a High-churchman. Behind him lay a tradition of devotion and service to the Established Church that conditioned his whole outlook upon ecclesiastical polity. Growing up in an Anglican rectory, educated in Oxford, influenced by his church-minded brother, Charles, Wesley could have with difficulty escaped a reasoned loyalty to the Church of England. He remained a member of it until the day of his death, and while he did many things that made the final separation of the Methodist societies from the Church of England inevitable, yet he himself seemed to look with genuine regret upon that possibility.

Methodism started as a spiritual life movement within the Church. The United Societies of the People called Methodists date from the last part of the year 1739. Here is its genesis. Wesley records that at that time:

Eight or ten persons came to me in sin, and earnestly groaning for redemption. They desired (as did two or

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three more the next day) that I would spend some time with them in prayer, and advise them how to flee from the wrath to come, which they saw continuously hanging over their heads. That we might have more time for this great work, I appointed a day when they might all come together, which from thenceforward they did every week, namely, on Thursday, in the evening. To these, and as many more, as desired to join with them (for their number increased daily), I gave those advices, from time to time, which I judged most needful for them; and we always concluded our meeting with prayer suited to their several necessities. This was the rise of the United Society, first in London, and then in other places.

Here was the simple beginning of a religious movement which was to grow into one of the most widespread, intricately organized, and powerful communions of all time.

The Methodist movement grew out of a protest over the deadness and unspiritual quality of religion in England. Much of this sterility rooted itself in the legalism of the Roman Catholic Church of England. Wesley sought to deliver his followers from the banalities and the superstitions of Rome. Hardly less satisfying was the smooth, conventional, academic approach of the Established Church to the heart hunger of the multitude. He believed "that there is a better

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religion to be attained, a religion worthy of God that gave it." And so he would gather together for heart-searching and spiritual discipline all those who loved God purely and needed neither priest nor high altar to point their way to the Lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world. If the Church would not shepherd the flock within its own fold, then there must be found a new fold and a new shepherd.

All these necessities implied no depreciatory attitude upon the part of Mr. Wesley for the Church as an institution of divine origin which would be "preserved to the end of time." He never wavered in his loyalty to the Church of Christ. The Church consists, in his view, of all those who have a living faith in Christ, whatever they are called by themselves or by others. It is a society founded by Christ himself and by his commission propagated throughout the world. In a sermon Wesley writes: "The catholic or universal Church is all persons in the universe whom God hath called out of the world as to entitle them to the preceding character; as to be one body, united by one Spirit; having one faith, one hope, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in them all—one holy society of true believers." This catholic and universal Church is "ever one," for in every age and nation it is the one body

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of Christ; it is "ever holy," for no unholy man can possibly be a member of it; it is "ever orthodox" in all things necessary to salvation; ever secure in its possession of a perpetual succession of teachers and pastors "divinely appointed and divinely assisted." The loftiness and universality of this conception of the Church formed the background and the environing sense of stability that made every little Methodist society or band feel that it was a part of the Church of the living God, visible and invisible, the *una sancta* which is the body of Christ.

As I study Mr. Wesley's attitude to the Church as an institution and as an instrument of God's purpose in the world, I am impressed with four characteristics of that attitude which are worthy of our observation. We need to look at them mainly because they have a definite bearing upon the consideration of our message today. And first I should like for us to observe his attitude to the sacraments and ordinances of the Church. The Lord's Supper was the central act of Christian worship. Its neglect upon the part of any member was a great loss, and those practicing such omissions became "dead as stones." In the true Church the sacraments are duly administered not alone to those who are perfect, but to those particularly who can truly say, "The remembrance of our

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sins is grievous unto us." No fitness is required save a sense of "utter sinfulness and helplessness."

Methodism looked upon the Lord's Supper as a means of grace, the observance of which is required for growth in spiritual character. Mr. Wesley discarded any Romish view of the sacrament. The bread and the wine were symbols of his broken body and shed blood, and no crass superstition of transubstantiation marred the spiritual beauty and holy efficacy of this sacred service of remembrance.

Concerning baptism his scriptural position is equally clear. He does not believe in baptismal regeneration, but regards the act as the sign and seal of faith in Christ and a dedication to his cause. As to the method he seems indifferent, indicating in his *Notes on the New Testament* that the early practice may have been immersion. He believes in infant baptism, but definitely turns away from the rite as implying the regeneration of the child. To Wesley baptism was important but far less central than the Lord's Supper. But in his attitude to the rites and sacraments he has left us a reverent example which is grounded in a spiritual conception of the sacramental values of life as administered by the Church acting as the instrument of God's will for mankind.

A second characteristic of Wesley's conception of

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the Church centers around the idea of fellowship. The Church was to provide for the communion of saints. Like the apostles in New Testament times "they broke bread together in their own homes; they ate with a glad and simple heart, praising God." Their food at these love feasts was only "a little plain cake and water," but in many instances Wesley records that "the power of God came mightily upon us insomuch that many cried out for exceeding joy." The institution of watch night was also a plan to increase fellowship among believers. Starting spontaneously, it soon won Wesley's approbation although there were many to criticize. "I believed it might be made of general use," he says, "so I sent them word, I designated to watch with them on the Friday nearest the full moon, that we might have light thither and back again. . . . On Friday an abundance of people came. I began preaching between eight and nine; and we continued until a little beyond the noon of night, singing, praying, and praising God." He records later, "We have found a peculiar blessing at these seasons."

Early Methodists had another service in which Christian fellowship was lifted to a high plane of emotional fervor. It was the Covenant Service, in which they solemnly renewed their covenant with God. At some of these meetings of consecration eighteen hun-

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dred and more people participated, and Wesley records it "was a time never to be forgotten. God poured down upon the assembly the spirit of grace and supplication." He refers to it in his *Journal* as "a scriptural means of grace which is now almost everywhere forgotten, except among the Methodists." Church life among those early Methodist folk was founded on the idea that to build one another up in the most holy faith was the obligation of every group which named the name of Jesus. And herein lay the secret of their overwhelming joy in the Lord and their evangelistic fervor.

Mr. Wesley has given to modern Methodism a heritage of freedom and realistic common sense in his attitude to the Church as an institution. Churchman that he was, he was never bound to an unmeaning rule or an ecclesiastical custom. His whole attitude was pragmatic. If anything that was traditional in the Church worked effectively, and made for the salvation of souls, well and good; if it did not, he was prepared to let it go. This practical attitude was made clear in a letter to the Bishop of Oxford in 1746: "Methinks I would go deeper. I would inquire what is the end of all ecclesiastical order. Is it not to bring souls from the power of Satan to God and to build them up in fear and love? Order, then, is so far

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valuable as it answers these ends; and if it answers them not, it is nothing worth." In the same strain he one time said to the Bishop of London, "Church or no Church, we must attend to the work of saving souls." Mr. Wesley knew the difference between means to an end and the end itself.

Perhaps we in American Methodism have the most striking illustration of Wesley's freedom in the use of the ordinances of the Church, for our episcopacy had its roots in the irregular ordination which the founder of Methodism gave to Dr. Coke. After vainly trying to persuade the Bishop of London to ordain some preachers for America, Mr. Wesley took the situation in hand and ordained Richard Whatcoat and Thomas Vasey as presbyters and Thomas Coke as superintendent for the American societies. We have not been unduly concerned over the validity of these ordinations. The simple truth is that Wesley believed his preachers were truly called of God and were being used of God in the work of the ministry, and while he preferred regular ordination for them "when it could be had," he regarded himself as a scriptural *episcopus* and therefore qualified to give them the ordination which would regularize their official character as true ministers of the gospel. In the last analysis, in that last resort where truth is validated,

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we must admit that Mr. Wesley was better qualified for so sacred a ministry of spiritual enduement than many a bishop of more orthodox standing but less conspicuous spiritual endowment. His irregular ordination of Coke is not a light trifling with sacred tradition. It is rather an example of the principle Jesus enunciated when he said that the Sâbbath was made for man, that the interests of people is the superior law and that no dead hand of formalism must arrest the movement of the Spirit of God working in the hearts of men.

One cannot close this cursory study of the original and unconventional approach of Mr. Wesley to the Church as an instrument of God's purpose without pausing to observe the marvelous organizing genius which he exhibited in making his societies really function as centers of religious life. Bishop McConnell tells us that we cannot understand the authority that Wesley exercised over the Methodist groups unless we take "at about full value his own statement of Methodism as a society and not as a Church." Ultimately these little bands of believers became irresistibly a Church and as such they inherited from their rigid founder a sense of order and discipline which has characterized them even to this day. Take two illustrations of this fine sense of the right way to get

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a thing done, evidences of this "peculiar talent" of Mr. Wesley. Knowing the essential place of good character in a minister and realizing the moral perils that always beset the preacher, he inaugurates the practice of calling the name in public and examining the character once a year of every Methodist preacher who goes out with an appointment. Could there be devised any more effective safeguard against unclean prophets than this ancient and still honored law of Methodism? Or look at the break with convention involved in his use of laymen. It was an innovation of startling effect. He took laymen and used them as Jesus used the fishermen of Galilee and judged them not by the hands that had been laid upon their heads but by the fervor and effectiveness of their living witness to a saving knowledge of God. He once remarked that soul-damning clergymen laid him under more difficulties than soul-saving laymen. In his famous letter to Alexander Mather we must not overlook his less frequently observed attitude to laymen: "Give me one hundred preachers who fear God, and *I care not a straw whether they be clergymen or laymen*, such alone will shake the gates of Hell and set up the Kingdom of Heaven on earth." It took Methodism a long time to catch up with the Christlike discernment of its founder.

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How does all this background fit into the picture of our present-day attitude to the Church? Is there here in these early days some message to modern Methodism? Are we standing today on sure ground when we try to interpret to the modern man a view of this sacred institution which will answer his questions and recapture his diminishing respect for the Church and its indispensable place in the religious life of our world? I think we are, and once again we may thank God that our historic approach is not cluttered up with a lot of dead and uncritical conventionality with which the intelligent modern believer will have no sympathy.

Methodism has a message today concerning the Church which the world needs to hear and which, if consistently proclaimed, will find a ready response from a wistful generation that is without spiritual anchorage. There are certain outstanding characteristics of the Church which today need new emphasis.

Let Methodism proclaim again the divine origin and character of the Church. This conception has lost favor due to the materialistic bent of our present-day mood. In a world that has largely lost its sense of wonder, that exalts naturalism in thinking and is careless of history and ignorant concerning New Testament concepts, it is almost inevitable that the mys-

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tical truth of the nature of the Church should almost completely escape us. Men are prone to think of it as just one more organization, relation to which is optional, if not whimsically unimportant. We preachers ourselves are often responsible for this careless and secularized attitude. We take people into the Church with a casualness that does not attend even a lodge initiation. We proceed as though the end to be sought was to enroll and report as many members as possible, regardless of the real inner state of heart of those thus enrolled. No wonder the man on the street often treats the Church disdainfully. And then our rolls are swelled by men and women who are members in name only, who give neither time nor money to set the Kingdom forward, who often have to be cajoled into even occasional attendance. We do not act as though this institution were indeed the body of Christ and membership in it best interpreted in terms of union with him. We cannot expect the world to take seriously an institution for whose sanctity we ourselves often have scant regard. If the Church in itself, as an institution, is not divine, it has only a passing interest for mankind. It is Jesus Christ alive in his world. It is the body through which he moves, lives, and redeems in our day. He is bound up with it in mysterious oneness. To honor the Church

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is to honor the Lord; to persecute it is to persecute him; to ignore it is to ignore the Christ; to dishonor it with sin is to defame the fair name of Jesus. "I am in the midst of them." With all its weakness and dullness of heart, the Church still remains God's best way to get his work and will done in the world.

It must be clearly understood that the essential character of the Church is not dependent upon the meritoriousness of its members. While its influence in the world may be determined by the righteousness or unrighteousness of those who have entered into its covenants, it must be never forgotten that the Church is in itself holy because it is the home of the Risen Lord present in the Spirit. The Church not only proclaims and expounds a tradition, but it lives a supernatural life which is the continuing of the original redemptive act of God which is the historic basis for the tradition itself. Thus holiness, catholicity, unity, and apostolicity are the marks *ab origine* of the Church of the Living God.

Men today are seeking for some institution that can endure. So many have toppled or betrayed mankind by their flimsy infidelity that there is a yearning for something that can stand, that is built on a rock, that cannot be forever changing with each shifting emphasis of doctrine. They want an anchor in the time

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of threatening storm. Jesus seemed to have sensed this desire and to have answered it with a divine institution against which he promised that the gates of hell shall not prevail. Occasionally, like noontime on Calvary's hill, the light seems to have gone out and a little band holding aloft the banner of Christ seems to have suffered an eclipse, but always the sun comes out once more. They die today to live again tomorrow. In the citadel of the believing Church's heart there is a fortress of faith which the world can never take. It is the invincible will of God enshrined in human hearts and it is as deathless as was his Spirit on the cross. Its body may be broken, but that strange inner reality which is the eternal in God and man can never be imprisoned or made extinct. "Behold, I am alive forever more."

A corollary of the divine nature of the Church is its universal character. The Church is as broad as mankind. It is the communion in all lands of those who believe in Jesus Christ. It knows no geographical boundaries, it speaks no dialect, it is the possession of no single race or culture. It is a world fellowship by virtue of the fact that it is the expression in history of the universal Christ. Nor does the true Church know any calendar. It is eternal. Its fortunes may be buffeted by circumstance, its

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devotees scattered by persecution, its high principles betrayed within its own household, but it lives on because it is the dwelling place of the eternal God and it cannot be defeated by the faithless will of man. Confronted as we are by world revolution, one asks, "Will the Church survive?" "If the foundations are destroyed, what shall the righteous do?" There are two answers. In the first place, there are invisible bedrock foundations which cannot be destroyed; and secondly, in any event there is only one thing for the righteous to do, and that is, keep on being righteous until a new world, founded on righteousness, comes into being and acceptance. The Church is as eternal as the will of God.

It is highly significant that Christianity today forms the sole effective hope of world unity. All other bonds have broken down, betrayed by racialisms and nationalisms. Only in the religion of the universal Christ is there hope for brotherhood and world fellowship. Hence the nature of the Church as the ultimate centrality of life becomes the all-important consideration of our modern times. And as we languish in despair over our failure to achieve unity in economic life or cultural exchange, we may take heart as we see the prayer of our Lord for unity among believers becoming an increasing reality even across

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the barriers of men's hate. Only a world Church can meet a world need. Only a universal Christ, "all men's Man," can answer the universal hunger of the human heart for redemption.

All of this means the death of sectarianism. Its day is long overpast and we should rejoice in the increasing acceptance of the spirit of unity and co-operation. We shall never all think alike, and it was never intended that we should. But there is a center of common loyalty around which our hearts cluster, and in Jesus Christ all his scattered disciples are one. The prosperity of any individual communion will rest not so much upon its singularity and stubborn devotion to the past, but rather upon the degree to which it lends encouragement to the growing desire for Christian unity. There is to be one "flock," not one "fold." The great tradition of the supremacy of the gospel must be preserved, and the true function of the Church is not sectarian, or national, but supernational and divinely universal. It is symbolic of the eternal secret of our oneness that at Oxford the one sacramental act which submerged all differences was at the table of the Lord's Supper, upon which lay the emblems of that broken body and shed blood which for us sinners was freely given on Calvary, to bring us all out of our perilous individualisms into the se-

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curity of the fold where there is one Shepherd and one flock.

Some will claim that this weakens our doctrinal integrity. The fear is that we shall lose character and the advantages of denominational uniqueness by a too liberal sharing with other faiths. The goal itself is to be questioned, but the argument fails because today our separate denominations draw their strength not from their independence but from their corporate relation to the body of Christ, which is the Church Universal. "The branch cannot bear fruit of itself except it abide in the vine."

Does this mean that Methodism has no doctrinal foundation? No; but it does gloriously mean that our dependence is not upon the individualism of our doctrinal belief, but rather upon the fervor and fidelity with which we believe and preach the great cardinal doctrines of the New Testament. Methodists accept the doctrinal basis of the historic creeds of Christendom. They depart in nowise from the affirmations of the Apostles' and the Nicene Creeds. We may not be known for our belief in this marginal doctrine or that, but let no man say that Methodism is without its clear and definite faith. For do we not believe in the fatherhood of God, the sonship of Jesus Christ, the power of the Holy Spirit, repentance from sin,

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salvation by grace, the witness of the Spirit, the sanctification of the believer, the resurrection of the dead, and the life everlasting? Here is enough and to spare for an ample gospel ministry of preaching, and it is our humble pride that these priceless truths belong not alone to us but to every evangelical believer who accepts his New Testament.

All our background conditions modern Methodism for another significant contribution to the need of this age. The dignity and freedom of our inheritance suggest that we can build a church which preserves the sanctities of a beautiful liturgy and at the same time keeps itself from deadening formalism. We can worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness and at the same time not lose the common touch. The human spirit turns instinctively toward the mystery of worship. But worship is not an end in itself, it is only an avenue to the realized presence of God. There are two extremes. The formal and excessive ritualism of some churches is more like an aesthetic pageant than a genuine and humble entrance into the presence of the Lord. On the other hand, the crude, unordered approach to the Most High which some of our churches practice is little less than an affront to the human sense of decency and to the divine nature in which beauty dwells and loveliness is of the very

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essence. Surely there is need today for worshipful sanctuaries and inspiring and uplifting ritual services. There is also room for that spontaneous freedom of the spirit, that uncharted liberty which, though undiagramed, is none the less the Voice of God in the heart of the believer. We can keep both values, orderliness and freedom, reverence and spontaneity, beauty of soul and ardor of spirit. In the broad cosmopolitanism of Wesley which made him equally at home in St. Mary's in Oxford and in the open spaces at the mouth of a Bristol colliery, among the dons of a university and the rough peasants of Wales—surely in such realistic adaptation to the needs of different groups there is charted for us a path in which we might wisely follow.

One of the gravest perils which confronts our Methodism today is the menace of an unwieldy and overintricate organizational machinery. Sometimes we are appalled by its very hugeness and its almost overwhelming cumbersomeness. Will the spirit of Methodism be broken on the wheels of its machinery? Are we in danger of squandering our power in an effort to make the wheels go round? These questions disturb many and must be seriously faced.

Let us frankly recognize that intricate and highly developed organization is not in itself something to be

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condemned. It goes with the higher rather than the lower forms of life. The human body fulfills its noble function in life not in spite of but because of its delicate and almost weird adjustments and balances. The delivery and the conservation of power is a highly technical and involved process in electrical engineering. Business is carried on today in its larger areas by commercial organizations that are examples of efficiency and outreach. Some people seem to think that the law that is accepted everywhere else stops at the door of religion, that here there must be no mechanics and only the simplest framework for promotion. But the virtue we seek is not found in the mere fact of skeletal simplicity. Even the apostles found it wise to set up a differentiation of responsibility in the Jerusalem church.

Take, as an illustration, the primary task of creating, sustaining, and administering the business of carrying the gospel through our missionaries to the non-Christian world. We cannot say, "Go to, we will save the world." It is more complex than that. The moral obligation for world redemption must be made commanding and intelligible to many thousands of people; they must be persuaded to support the missionary enterprise; someone must be found to answer the call to go; that person must be educated and specifi-

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cally trained; he must be transported, taught the language, housed, supported with funds he does not raise. Problems arising with governments must be solved, buildings must be constructed, oversight of personnel is constantly needed; the missionary must be held up by the prayers of those that send him; his work must be gradually turned over to native leadership. No, the administration of missions is not a simple matter. It is an involved and highly organized procedure for the simple reason that it is an intricate task and has an outreach that is world-wide.

Ezekiel has a bold figure of speech which seems a contradiction in itself but which holds in its heart a sublime truth. In the twentieth verse of the first chapter he concludes a description of the wheels that he saw in his vision with this sentence: "For the spirit of life was in the wheels." It is not the wheels that count; it is the Spirit that dwells in them and works through them. Ecclesiastical machinery is indispensable but it is of value only as it retains the spirit of life within it and gives effective expression to those great and gracious concepts of Spirit-filled living that overflow the forms in which they are mediated to mankind. Alexander McLaren said a generation ago words that might with even greater appositeness be spoken to every Methodist church in all the land:

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We spend much pains and effort nowadays in perfecting our organizations and consolidating our resources, and I have not a word to say against that. But heavier machinery needs more power in the engine, and that means greater capacity in your boilers and more fire in your furnace. The more complete our organization, the more do we need a firm hold of Christ, or we shall be overweighted by it, shall be in danger of burning incense to our own net, shall be tempted to trust in drill rather than in courage, in mechanism rather than in the life drawn from Christ.

Perhaps the gravest peril that confronts the Church today is a kind of inferiority complex. By that I mean that too often the Church has been thinking of itself in terms of humanity rather than divinity. It has approached problems apologetically, as though it were only one more vote around the table, one more voice in the chorus of confusion seeking to solve our modern dilemmas. It has timidly sought standing room in the forums of life rather than claimed its rightful place as judge of all men.

Society is everywhere admittedly maladjusted. Its present agony is not unrelated to precedent confusion and disunity. Men are almost in panic over building any secure and workable structure of common life for individuals and nations. There is no solution in

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business, statesmen are helpless, the power masters have driven the world to madness. Only in spiritual dynamics is there hope. "The ultimate answers to the questions that humanity raises are not, and never have been, in the flesh." They are in the spirit; in those fundamental faiths by which mankind has always found security and fullness of life. But if the Church has no voice but only an echo of the world's melancholy despair, why should this generation listen? This is the secret of much of the spiritual disillusionment we find abroad today. The Church has not measured up to its august responsibility. It has refused to accept the power of the keys entrusted to it by its Founder. It has spoken not out of eternity but out of time; it has called men to congenial rather than sacrificial tasks. It has followed expediency when the need was for absolutes. It has feared to proclaim the embarrassing divisiveness of Jesus' words. It has compromised its independence by its dependence upon material resources.

In the blinding glare of the world's pitiable confusion we see our failure and we would not spare ourselves the condemnation that rightly belongs to us. We need to repent. Our pride must go; our faith in bigness and power and numbers must be seen for what it is, a delusion and a sin. All our windows

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must be opened again toward heaven. We must face once more the Cross that stands solemnly athwart our path. Will we bear it as He did up the hill to another Calvary, or shall we grab the sword and rush to our own defense? The Church is Christ alive today, and if we seek any method of conquest that he repudiated, then he will repudiate us. There is a road of power open to his people when they are willing to share his suffering, to bear his Cross, and pay his price for victory. The Church of Jesus Christ must accept responsibility for the character and type of civilization in which our children shall live. It is the one institution whose authority is fully consonant with the moral law of the universe. It has the one voice that can sound out of the eternities into time. It represents the pattern formed and prefigured in the Mount, by which humanity must at last build the City of God upon the earth. Too many times has this Church concerned itself with lesser things when it was called to deal with august imperatives. Too many times has it spent its time counting its gains and losses when it should be building a new heaven and a new earth. The future of the Church is not something that can be created by the artifice or the cleverness of man; it is the incarnate will of the Living God projecting itself

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into life through channels of human devotion, sacrifice, and loyalty.

In the dim beginnings of history men found God in the open spaces and under the bending sky. There they erected their stone altars, the Bethels of their searching spirits. Later, feeling the need for a visible dwelling place of the Most High, they built an ark and clothed it with sanctity and the awesomeness of his presence. Then, in the unfolding of their reverence for the house of the Lord, they reared a temple and within its heart a Holy of Holies into which mystic center the priests alone could enter. On through the ages men thus were seeking to make objective and real the presence of God in their midst.

Jesus, sublimely sensitive to these wistful yearnings, gathered them up in his person and upon the declaration of faith in himself as the Son of the Living God founded in time and in eternity his Church, and declared that its life was inviolate and against it no power of earth or hell could ever avail. It comes down to us today consecrated with his living presence, preserved by the blood of the martyr, made glorious by the faith of the apostle and the prophet. It has been driven into the wilderness, but its altars still stand; it has been sent into the catacombs, but even there it discovered again its life; it has fallen before

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the sword of the invader, but its crosses have been found amid the very sands that swallowed up its blood. It has been traduced by an unholy alliance with the state only to cast at last its earthly despoilers from their trembling thrones. It has been wounded in the house of its friends, compromised in the arenas of worldly pride, defied in the councils of war, scorned in the treaties of peace, and yet it lives on in power, the last deathless hope of a dying world.

Into this glorious inheritance the new Methodism is called of God. She stands upon the threshold of new opportunities and new power. I am not so much concerned over the bigness of the Methodist Church; I am concerned over her fidelity to the teachings of her Lord. I am not so much concerned over the material wealth of the Methodist Church; I am concerned that she shall put her trust in the Lord God and him only. I am not so much concerned over the social and intellectual rating of her ministry and membership; I am concerned that she should know the mind of Christ and be filled with his compassion. I am not so much concerned over who shall speak for the Methodist Church; I am concerned that when Methodism does speak she shall sound forth with uncompromising clarity the eternal truth which was in the beginning and came to full and final expression in

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the Word of God, which dwelt among us and evermore dwelleth in us.

"And I heard a great voice, saying, Alleluia; Salvation, and glory, and honour, and power, unto the Lord our God. . . . Behold, I come quickly; and my reward is with me, to give every man according as his work shall be. I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end, the first and the last. . . . The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with us all" in united Methodism.

III

Evangelism and the Saving of Souls

WHEN THE WESLEYAN MOVEMENT BEGAN THE state of religion in England was deplorable. On many hands there were prophecies that the days of the Church were numbered and that Christianity would soon pass into the halls of forgotten superstitions. While most people disclaimed such pessimism, they were nevertheless well aware of the fact that all was not well with the Church. The clergy were professional in their attitudes; the attendance upon the services of the sanctuary was distressingly small; the morals of the average man seemed little affected by the preachments of the preacher, and the great masses of England's common people simply passed up the parson and were indifferent to his gospel and his church. This alarming condition was a source of grief and concern to a spiritually minded group within the Church of England, but they were seemingly powerless to alter the general outlook.

Then came the Wesleys. God looked upon the sorrows of his people and sent them a new leader and prophet. We are deeply impressed with the fact that

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the unpredictable emergence of John and Charles Wesley was a direct intervention of the Spirit of God into the affairs of men. Why should it not be so? If God raised up Moses, if he sent forth John the Baptist, if "in the fullness of time" he gave us his only begotten Son, if he arrested in his mad career and claimed for the Gentile world Saul of Tarsus, who are we to say that he was not brooding in a later century over the waywardness of men's hearts when he commissioned John Wesley to lay the foundation for the Evangelical Revival of the eighteenth century? We must not deny to the creative Spirit of the universe the power to move at any time he wills in beneficent energy upon the world he has created and which he sustains for high moral ends.

The famous fire at the Epworth rectory in 1709, when John was a lad of nearly six, and his strange and providential rescue, left upon his mind a vivid impression which remained with him all his life. He kept always a feeling that he was "a brand plucked from the burning" and that his escape marked him for some special service to God. His mother showed the same divine impress and two years after the fire records in her *Journal*: "I do intend to be more particularly careful of the soul of this child, that Thou hast so mercifully provided for, than ever I have been,

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that I may do my endeavor to instill into his mind the principles of true religion and virtue. Lord, give me grace to do it sincerely and prudently and bless my attempts with good success." It is evident that God heard the prayer of Susannah Wesley and had for her child a destiny which, like that of Mary's Son, was greater than even his mother could imagine. "He came out of the hands of his mother with the temper of a fine piece of steel." The touch of a divine providence was resting upon him.

John Wesley's evangelistic fervor goes back to another fire, the one that was kindled in his heart at Aldersgate. Three days before the twenty-fourth of May, 1738, his brother Charles also had received the witness of the Spirit and had gained the assurance that Christ had died for him and had delivered him from the penalty of Adam's transgression. So spectacular was the experience of John we have been wont to overlook Charles's almost exactly contemporaneous work of grace. But it was no less epochal and determinative. Its similarity to that of his brother's and its solemn significance are indicated by a hymn he wrote a year later, entitled "For the Anniversary Day of One's Conversion."

Then with my *heart* I first believed,
Believed with faith divine;

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Power with the Holy Ghost received
To call the Saviour *mine*.

I felt my Lord's atoning blood
Close to *my* soul applied;
Me, me, He loved—the Son of God
For me, for me, He died.

There is no power given to us by which we can estimate the spiritual dynamic that flowed into the life of the world from these transforming experiences of the Wesley brothers. John was the flaming evangelist, "logic on fire," while Charles sang the experiences of redeeming love into the hearts of multitudes from whom the spirit of gladness had departed. It took them both to do what God had in mind for his world.

When the Wesleys were delivered from the perils of too much religious introspection, they turned to outpour their lives in a passion for the common man. The leaders of the nation in the eighteenth century ignored the masses. They did not count. They were brutish and ignorant and servile, and the social order of that day revealed a yawning chasm between the cultured minority at the top and the unheeding and hopeless mass at the bottom. Wesley turned to the plain people from the very first. Whether the higher

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classes would hear him or not, he found his responsive audiences among the great throngs of workers and peasants and the socially underprivileged. Like his Master he went about doing good and the common people heard him gladly. Like Jesus he was the bearer of good news, and like his Lord he was cast out of their synagogues and had to take to the open fields.

Wesley went to the people because he valued man according to Jesus' scale of valuation. It was not a mere bit of popular strategy. He really believed he had a gospel for the multitudes and, speaking to them from their level, man to man, he gave always the impression "that the least and wickedest in the crowd had a soul worth saving." And this passion drove him like a shuttle of light across the darkened moors and into the slums of great cities and along the highways of old England, ever bearing with importunate earnestness the good news of the gospel of Jesus, the Redeemer from sin and death.

Early and late, o'er land and sea ondriven,
In youth, in eager manhood, age extreme,
Driven on forever, back and forth the world,
By that divine omnipotent desire,
The hunger and the passion for men's souls.¹

¹ From "John Wesley," by Richard Watson Gilder. By permission of Houghton Mifflin Co.

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Behind all the great preaching there are always great ideas, not vapid and chattering pleasantries about current events, but the unfolding of those structural conceptions of nature and grace upon which religion at last does rest. The early Methodists believed certain great truths about God and man and they were sure that their beliefs mattered tremendously in the lives of the men and women to whom they were preaching. The lost condition of the unregenerate soul, the exceeding sinfulness of sin, the necessity for godly repentance, the unmerited grace of the Lord, the miracle of regeneration in the believing heart—all these were the doctrinal framework upon which the Methodist evangel rested. It plowed deep. It dealt with essential, eternal matters. It brought about not reformation but regeneration; all things became new as the new man in Christ accepted the "sufficient, sovereign, saving grace" of Christ.

Wesleyan preaching came into conflict with the dominant concepts of Calvinism, which was much in vogue in those days. There is much truth in the position of the Calvinists when they insist upon the sovereignty of God, attributing the whole of man's salvation to the grace of God. This, however, is only one side of the Divine, and to insist that the eternal decree of the Almighty does give grace to some and

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withholds it from others, regardless of antecedent moral conditions in the individual, is to impose too great a burden on the will of God and too light a responsibility upon the free choice of man. To Wesley it was a thing incomprehensible, if not ethically reprehensible, to believe that "by virtue of an eternal, unchangeable, irresistible decree of God, one part of mankind are infallibly saved, and the rest infallibly damned." Methodism killed this form of crude Calvinism by its impassioned evangelism, its preaching of the freedom of the will, its insistence that the grace of God was free for all who earnestly sought it. This is now an evangelical commonplace in the realm of theology, and it was Methodism that brought the love of God out of a footnote and set it in the body of creedal belief.

It has been often contended that once an evangelistic passion is granted, the methods will take care of themselves. That is only a half-truth. Spiritual power flows through wisely constructed plans more effectively than through haphazard methods. And in this field Wesley was a master. He has given to us an inheritance from which we should never depart. His *Journal* reveals a technique in the field of evangelism that would be surprisingly successful today.

Take, for illustration, the evangelistic significance

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of the little groups called "bands" or "societies." They were formed for the definite purposes of making salvation an individual experience and sharing it with others. Their inner religious experience, their personal knowledge of God and sin and salvation were the subjects of discussion and the themes of the hymns they sang. These Methodist societies were the nuclei, or spiritual "cells," from which the power of God flowed and became manifest throughout a whole community. Here men dwelt with the grim and august realities of the moral universe and here they found release from the tyranny of the material. Into these little fellowships of believers sinners came to find life redeemed and renewed by the grace of an ever-present Lord. They were characterized by the utmost realism and frankness. The issue was so important that only utter sincerity could suffice. When the question was put to a member of one of Wesley's bands, "Do you desire that each of us shall tell you honestly what is in our hearts concerning you?" only souls desperately in earnest search after God and spiritual peace could stand such solemn probing into their inmost life. And yet out of such agonizing experiences came the surety and confidence that betokened the Methodists of those early days.

Or consider the thrust of John Wesley's field

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preaching. It was motivated by a divine and relentless urgency. It reminds one of the Pauline strategy: "All things to all men, if by any means I might save some." In the stuffy, conventionalized English churches were a few religiously élite—the "righteous" whom the Lord sought not. Outside was the multitude, hungry, unshepherded, unsaved. There was but one course for a man to take who dwelt always with the practical realities of a situation as Wesley did. And that was to go to the crowds. It involved ecclesiastical heresy and social ostracism, but go he did, and the Church outside the Church became greater than the Church within the Church. Multitudes heard him, early in the morning at the mouth of the mine, late in the evening after the day's work was done. And the power of God fell upon the people and "the Lord added daily the saved to their number." Wesley did not lightly break with the conventions of his day and take to the fields but, submerging his own pride under the weight of an apostolic urgency, he decided "to become more vile" and preach the word outside the stately walls and the formal pulpits of England. It was the passion for souls that drove him out and kept him forever pleading with the throngs in market place and wayside roads to give heed to the state of their souls.

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Nor was Wesley less quick to use to its full advantage the methods of personal evangelism. He was out to win men to Christ, and his long life is crowded with story after story of his dealings with individual souls. He yearned for their salvation, he unfolded their sins before them, he plead with them to yield to Christ. How he used letter writing to further this end! If he could not reach an individual for a personal interview, then there would go a letter with the same importunate plea for righteousness and surrender to God. With Wesley letter writing was not a social amenity; it was a means of grace by which he might share with his correspondent the deep things that were upon his heart and point the way to the cross and the healing touch of Jesus for anyone who was troubled.

There is an amusing but deeply revealing incident recorded in Wesley's *Journal* under the date of May 20, 1740. It reveals the ever restless absorption of the man in the business of saving every soul with whom he came into contact:

I overtook a serious man with whom I immediately fell into conversation. He presently gave me to know what his opinions were, therefore I said nothing to contradict them. But that did not content him: he was quite uneasy to know whether I held the doctrine of the decrees as he

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did; but I told him, over and over, we had better keep to practical things, lest we should be angry at one another. And so we did for two miles, till he caught me unawares, and dragged me into the dispute before I knew where I was. He then grew warmer and warmer, told me I was rotten at heart, and supposed I was one of John Wesley's followers. I told him, "No, I am John Wesley himself!" upon which he would gladly have run away outright, but being the better mounted of the two, I kept close to his side and endeavoured to show him his heart till we came into the street of Northampton.

Tremendous! Magnificent! Here is the man who changed England, unwilling to let a casual companion go until he had "shown him his heart." And that unknown traveler when his anger subsided, knew that he had met the prophet of God that day on the road into Northampton.

Thus there comes down to us the epic story of a great revival, builded upon the eternal truths of the gospel and preached by as impassioned a band of God's ambassadors as ever trod the earth. It not only redeemed uncounted thousands from sin but it typed a movement which history was to carry forward with expanding power. Our inheritance is not less suggestive and compelling when we turn to the beginnings of American Methodism. Here the same spirit

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breathed in Asbury and McKendree and Jesse Lee and a host of others who followed the pioneer to the rim of the wilderness and claimed for the Kingdom of God every scattered settlement and rough frontiersman until the passion of the adventurer was matched and subdued by the zeal of the evangelist.

Is this tradition to be denied? Has Methodism drifted into an unhuman intellectualism? Has her ardor for souls suffered an arrested development because of the soft secularism which so easily besets our spiritual life in this modern day? Can Methodism regain her own proper genius and return to the fountains of power from which she once drank, and "recapture that first fine careless rapture"? Surely, the need is no less prevalent or poignant. The world waits for a flaming message from lips that have been touched with a coal of fire, for the outpouring of the Holy Spirit upon our sinful generation, and for the shout of the redeemed whose transgressions have been forgiven by the unyielding grace of a God who in Christ hath delivered us from the law of sin and death and through his Spirit hath presented us blameless before the image of his presence. But certain very definite difficulties confront us. Our slackened tempo in evangelism may be due to certain obstacles which have slowed down our enthusiasm and undercut the

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very central presuppositions upon which such enthusiasms rest. Let us in candor of spirit and humility of heart examine some of these modern attitudes and the difficulties which they present.

Our first concern must be with the undeniable dilemma which confronts the average preacher. He has been trained to believe that the old type of evangelism practiced by his fathers is outmoded, antiquated, and unacceptable to a modern congregation. On the other hand, he has found no effective substitute for it. He passes up the vivid theology of his forefathers but finds the humanistic psychology now in vogue a poor and weak alternative. He scorns the method of the old-time sinner at the altar but he has discovered that the mild private regret for mistakes which his modern convert confesses is singularly unproductive of real piety. He rebels against the uneducational approach of the earlier evangelist but with all his new educational technique he is discouraged over his efforts to bring about godly sorrow for sin or joyous and unquestioning acceptance of Christ. He lifts his eyebrows over the manifestations of religious enthusiasm often evident in the revivals of the last century; he refers to them as primitive traits of emotionally abnormal individuals, but he is saddened oftentimes by the casual and almost nonchalant way in

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which people today join the church with as much cool calculation as they exhibit in joining a civic club or a bridge club and with the display of about the same amount of enthusiasm. We have abandoned one technique and found no new and adequate substitute. We flounder in indecision, paying lip service often to an old emphasis but rejecting it in practice. We need to discover a new and acceptable philosophy of evangelism. And we need it desperately.

We are still afflicted with the educationally minded brother who rejects the revival method, and with the revivalist who trades on popular prejudice by minimizing and criticizing the educational approach. There is no conflict between education and evangelism. That battle was never worthy of an issue between intelligent churchmen. Those old dugouts should have long since been abandoned. There is no sense in otherwise good men shooting at each other across a theological No Man's Land when the battle is raging in another sector. We need both methods. Jesus and the New Testament make clear that all true education has at its heart an evangel of personality transformed by truth, and no education on campus or in local church that does not eventuate in creating a Christ-like character can long stand in theory or in practice. On the other hand, no evangelism that is not truly

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and persistently educational, that does not build up both mind and spirit, can claim or expect acceptance on the part of intelligent people today. From sterile and purposeless education and from vapid and weirdly fantastic evangelism alike may the good Lord deliver us!

Another of our difficulties we may frankly face. Many of our preachers lack an evangelical experience of religion in their own lives. They have come to the ministry through a normally progressive Christian process. Joining the church was a natural step in adolescence. College and seminary training placed the emphasis upon normal and level progress in Christian thought and life. The call to the ministry was a vocational adjustment indicated by certain gifts and benevolent attitudes to life but lacking the incandescent glow of a divine and resistless compulsion. And here this man of God is in the midstream of his ministry, doing a lot of good but driven by no inescapable urgency to save men, a stranger to the deeper love of Christ which compels, urged on by no passion of redemption such as made Paul wish himself anathema if he failed to win his brethren. There is an impersonal unconcern, almost cynical, as he reads of early Methodist preachers who cried out in an agony of intercession: "O God, give me souls or I die."

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You will remember that when the apostles went around to the churches and interviewed the believers who were testifying for Christ in a very wicked world, they asked them: "Did ye receive the Holy Ghost after ye believed?" They felt that a definite work of the Holy Spirit was essential to effective witnessing. They were continually to be expecting God to manifest himself in some new revelation or turn of events. Pentecostal gifts were a part of the spiritual equipment of the early Church. The Holy Spirit was the active and creative sponsor of their preaching. Our preaching is too much concerned with spiritual commonplaces, too unexpectant, too humanly sufficient. It has feet but no wings. It has words but no power. It has knowledge but little wisdom. It lacks that subduing and vitalizing breath of God which, brooding over the chaos of our human insufficiency, turns our weakness into power and sends our words with redeeming grace and transforming potency into the hearts of the troubled sinners.

No strong and effective evangelism ever grows out of an ill-defined and lax doctrine of sin. If sin doesn't matter, neither does salvation. If there is nothing to be saved from, why go to the trouble of worrying about being saved? Our fathers believed that sin damned people, in this world and in the world to come.

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Therefore they could talk with earnestness of "so great salvation." They were also persuaded that sin was not simply a mistake that could be remedied but that it was an evil that had to be atoned for. They believed that sin had wrecked God's world, challenged his authority over all life, and at last driven the only begotten Son of the Father to his death upon the cross. They held that the natural man knows not the things of the spirit and before one could enter into fellowship with God he had to be regenerated, born again from above. And this work of grace was wrought not by his own meritorious striving but rather by the free and unmerited gift of God through faith in Jesus Christ. And they expected that once a man was in Christ he was a new creature and old things had really passed away.

I would not maintain that Methodism today does not believe these great doctrines. But I would dare to suggest that they do not occupy the same place in our preaching that they did in our fathers'. They lived with these great truths; they were the framework of their gospel of redemption. They fought sin. They defied the devil. They pleaded with the sinner. All the time they moved with stern yet tender authoritativeness among the awesome mysteries of the human spirit and wooed men from sin to righteousness as

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though through them Christ was saying, "Be ye reconciled to God." No suave modernistic gospel of liberation that tones down the awfulness of sin or minimizes the cross of Christ will suffice to heal the world's hurt or redeem us from our disobedience.

I think it should be said before we leave consideration of the obstacles that deter our present evangelistic success that there is one more difficulty. It is largely atmospheric but none the less broadly obstructive. There is so much spiritual mediocrity among the members of the average church that it often benumbs the spirit of evangelism in the preacher's heart. There are so many people around who, although church members, are strangers to any work of grace that they form the worst possible apologetic for the thing the preacher is talking about. With unconscious logic the prospective convert often thinks if that is all there is to religion why should he go to the humiliation of publicly confessing his sins when there are members on the official bodies of the local church who have sins it never seems to occur to them to confess? He wonders whether he is to be saved to this kind of shallow hypocrisy. Any preacher who would win men to Christ needs, in addition to himself, exhibits B, C, and D. The saved men and women in his Church are his "fifth gospel." They are demonstrat-

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ing daily what he is pleading for on Sunday. Our laymen need a new conviction as to their responsibility not only to lead a winsome Christian life, but also to bear personal and individual testimony to what God has done for them. Dr. Bett pointedly observes, "When we think of the passionate evangelism of the early Methodists we must remember that it would simply have gone for nothing if the holy lives of the early Methodists had not backed up the evangelistic appeal."

If the central business of the Church is to win men and women to loyalty to Jesus Christ, then we must face our responsibility with a new seriousness in this day. Too much is expected of Methodism at this turn of the world's life for us to fail God. Too high and imperative is our tradition that now, in the present agonizing hour, we should be occupied with lesser things and fail to give leadership to all Christian forces in a sane and balanced, but none the less impassioned and Spirit-filled, evangelism. To do less is to deny the genius of our history and to surrender the commission that God gave to the Methodist Church to spread scriptural holiness over these lands. If these goals are accomplished four requisites must be met: First, we shall sound a new note in our preaching. The proclamation of the good news is central to the

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problem of salvation. The religious life of a church will rise no higher than the spiritual tone of its pulpit. Let me plead now for a new note of earnestness in preaching. Too often the man in the pulpit gives the impression that he is just preaching another sermon, that what he is talking about doesn't profoundly matter, that you can take it or leave it. And Mr. Average Member figures that if it doesn't materially matter to the parson himself, there is no need for him to take it too seriously. His somnolent inattention is a terrific indictment of the superficiality and banality of what the preacher is handing him out. I recall reading at the bottom of one of John Wesley's original letters, written to a brother minister and now framed in his study in City Road, these words: "Oh, do be very earnest, very earnest, my brother." There is a divine earnestness which characterizes all true preaching in every generation.

There must also be a new tone of authority. Men want to know. They want someone to speak to them who does know. We have stood about all the questions we can stand; we need some answers. Discussion groups are all right in their place, but the world waits for someone who can tell them what remains after all their queries have failed. We are witnessing today a popular response to certain marginal types

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of preaching which is shrewd enough to capitalize on this characteristic of the human mind. All these weird prophets of the "snake bite," "Jesus is coming," "Hitler is the beast" type could teach us something we ought to have known long ago. And that is that people have to have guidance; in religious matters they seek authority, and they will give an audience and finally loyalty to any man who appears to know what he is talking about and is able to buttress his pronouncements with the Word of God. We may vigorously question the exegesis of these fly-by-night evangelists and become disgusted with their crude showmanship, but that is no reason why we should let them be the only people in the community who speak with authority and certitude and who use Scripture to undergird their utterances. We suffer from a kind of inferiority complex which could be best cured by a lot of good strong gospel preaching saturated with the Word of God and backed up with a new baptism of confidence in the faith which we essentially hold but too tentatively declare.

We need to preach for a verdict. When Peter finished his discourse on the day of Pentecost his hearers cried out, "Men and brethren, what shall we do?" It should often be so with us. Real preaching is an attack upon the will, and if it fails to penetrate

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beneath the surface to this center where life issues are determined, it falls short of its creative purpose. A preacher should expect something to happen in the life of his hearers every time he preaches. It will put a new thrust into his utterances, a new tone into his voice. A sermon is not a lecture upon a religious theme. It is rather a definite attack upon those citadels of personality where the issues of life await determination. The expectance of the preacher creates expectancy on the part of his congregation, and it is always to the man who knows he has a message and who presses with tender but persistent urgency his theme upon his hearers' hearts that Christ fulfills his promise to give freely according to the measure of his faith.

The early Church got its start very largely through the power of personal testimony. There were no preachers as we know them today; there were no churches such as we have now. There were bands of believers who shared the good news with those who knew it not. The message of salvation passed from lip to lip, from life to life. "Ye are my witnesses." And the modern world cannot be saved by preaching alone. Only by personal testimony, one winning another, every man responsible for sharing with his neighbor, only in this way will the Kingdom come.

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We do not need to be experts in the Bible so as to be able to answer every question propounded. "I do not know who this man is," said the blind man; "all I know is that he opened my eyes. Once I was blind but now I see." That is the incontrovertible witness. You can tell another what Christ means to you. You can say to him, "Oh, let me commend *my* Saviour to *you*."

What would happen in Methodism if within the next three months every pastor would select one man in his community who was out of Christ, and then ask two or three other devout Christians to join him in daily intercessory prayer for the conversion of that man? Jesus said, "If two or three of you agree as touching anything it shall be done." Do you suppose he really meant it to apply to that kind of situation? I wonder. He prayed for Peter and won him back. Why should we not try it out? Why not trust his promise? Why not inaugurate a continuing, definite, all-the-year-round program of personal evangelism, particularized down to an individual and undergirded with faith and prayer? In Christ's name, I challenge you to try it.

One other suggestion which will be regarded in some quarters as quite radical: Methodism should go again to the masses. They are not in our churches.

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And for that they are not wholly to blame. In any event, they are not without the hunger for God and they need Christ desperately. Too long have we taken the aloof, complacent attitude that here is the church door, open on Sunday, so let them come if they want to. When the Master set the feast he sent out into the highways and byways to bring men in. Jesus came to call not the righteous but sinners to repentance. He came to seek and to save, to find the last, lost sheep. This strategy needs to be evaluated afresh, and faced fearlessly.

It could not be a greater shock to any modern Methodist to preach in the open air than it was to John Wesley. It cost him a struggle, but he decided he simply had to do it. And Methodism would not be alive today had it not been for field preaching. It persuaded the common man that religion was his vital concern. The crowd was nearly always on Wesley's side when the ruffians beset him, because they respected a man who believed he had something so important to talk about that he would break all the conventions and risk his own life to share it with them. The world needs religion above all else. Its redeeming power must permeate all life. It cannot be done by ministering to an exclusive and cultured minority in our comfortable pews. Christ needs to

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be broadcast. He needs to get on the air again. Why should not Methodism be the agency once more to take religion out of its cloisters and plunge it into the open spaces? Why should we yield our historic precedent for field preaching and turn it over to certain ignorant but earnest sects which are unafraid of derision? Is Methodism too respectable to adapt her method to a providential opportunity? The figure of John Wesley, scholar and master of Oxford, immaculately groomed, standing at the mouth of a mine in Wales, preaching to a miscellaneous multitude of workingmen coming out of the pit, until they were moved to tears and to repentance, is a scene Methodism today had better reckon with. "I do not fear," said this unconventional street preacher, "that Methodists will die out, but I do fear that they may become a dead sect." Ecclesiastical respectability will never save us; only the passion for men, driving us wherever His Spirit leads, will clothe us once again with our ancient power.

W. E. Sangster makes a bold statement in the title to his stirring book, *Methodism Can Be Born Again*. It may be proved, if we are willing. But it is only the Holy Spirit that can kindle a new fire upon the heart of our united Church. If our spiritual power were commensurate with our bulk and our material

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resources, we could reform this continent. But we lack the conscious, cleansing power of the Holy Spirit in far too many of our hearts. It is not our marvelous organization or our brilliant preaching or our modern educational program that will give Methodism her victory now. These are instrumentalities of which we must not pridefully boast. They have no significance except as channels of grace. Only the Spirit of God working in us and through us can lead our generation into the truth, and our Church into the abundant service to which she is called.

We need to seek forgiveness for the petty jealousies that have so often marred our sense of brotherhood; for the personal ambitions that have robbed us of joy; for the worship of outward, secularized standards of success that have crippled our spiritual effectiveness; for the fret and hurry of our driven lives with their consequent haste in prayer and omission of those quiet times of waiting upon the Lord. Winning men to Christ is essentially a spiritual adventure. It cannot be done by dead, non-conducting professionals. But when we yield ourselves to the sway and movement of his Spirit, God's strength becomes ours, miracles happen, souls are born into the Kingdom and there is joy in heaven and in all our hearts. Methodism's supreme need in this hour is a new bap-

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tism of the Holy Spirit. It is ours if we have the faith to ask for it; the courage to order our lives so we shall be fit to receive it; and the love to use it to bring to his feet the last and the least of his lost children everywhere. "Ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me unto the uttermost part of the earth." To that glorious quest of a kingdom of love and light, the Kingdom of God's dear Son, let us dedicate ourselves once more. Then Methodism will have claimed her God-ordained place in the economy of his Kingdom, and our message will be with power and with the demonstration of the Spirit in the hearts of repentant men.

IV

Human Society and Social Reform

THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY FURNISHED A STRANGELY dark background against the somber outlines of which the light of Methodism struggled to bring the dawn of a better day. It was an era of cruelty, soddenness, poverty, and widespread illiteracy. The jails were filled with men whose crimes were of questionable gravity and the mob spirit broke forth in protest against evils that were felt even if they could be but dimly rationalized. The political situation was badly in need of reform. The legislature was far from representative, and in Britain only one person in fifty enjoyed the privilege of the ballot. Society was divided into classes that had almost the social rigidity of a caste system. The rich looked with supercilious unconcern upon the poor. The lords and ladies disdained the commoners who by their labor made possible their aristocratic security. Pathetic returns from the small farms of England and the low wage scales in industrial centers created a sense of helplessness and hopelessness that rested like a pall of

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despair over the masses of the people. England in the middle eighteenth century was ripe for reform. "The old social structure began to crack in every joint, and new conditions demanded new adjustments at every turn."

Revolutionary forces came to birth in this century. It was a time of social beginning, crude and experimental, but none the less potent and creative. Underneath the crust of men's discontent there was the stir of an expanding social consciousness that forboded revolution and the racing threat of impending social change. Not many knew what was going on around them, but humanity had struck its tents and was once more on the march. Consider for a moment the cyclonic forces that were playing on the minds of Englishmen in the days of John Wesley. The French Revolution, the American Revolution, and the Industrial Revolution all are encompassed within his life span. Unrest knew no national boundaries. The spirits of men everywhere in the civilized world were being made aware of injustice, of haughty oppression, of the unfeeling domination of economic and spiritual overlords.

A more vivid conception of the yeastlike working of new social and intellectual forces can be gathered by noting the "clusters of geniuses" that moved across

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the stage of the world's life during the time when Methodism was attaining her growth as a religious movement. In Germany there were Goethe and Kant; in France, Rousseau, Robespierre, and Napoleon; in America, Washington and Jefferson and Webster; and in England, the elder and the younger Pitt, Burke, Hume, Wilberforce, Howard, Swift, Samuel Johnson, and a score of other hardly less distinguished personalities. It was with such giants as these that John and Charles Wesley shared the public eye. God seemed to have moved up his heaviest battalions to storm the citadels of political, social, and religious complacency.

What part did Methodism have in this stirring social process? John Wesley was pre-eminently a man of his day and generation. Through his spacious mind flowed all the streams of eighteenth-century life. He was no academic recluse weaving theological abstractions. He was an actor of amazing vigor upon the stage of public life and was probably the best-known man in England during his generation. He spoke and wrote on all the public questions of the hour. He undoubtedly affected the opinions of more Englishmen over a longer period of time than any single public character of the eighteenth century. It was inevitable therefore that the religious movement which he

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shaped and directed should both affect and be affected by the contemporary scene in the midst of which it had its origin and took its shape.

In broad and hurrying outline I should like to indicate the attitude of early Methodism to this rising social consciousness. For herein are solid and suggestive foundations upon which may rest with reassurance the message of Methodism to this generation. It needs to be admitted at the start that the preaching of the Wesleys was predominantly individualistic. They lived in a day when the "social gospel" as we know it had not entered into the mind of man. We must keep Wesley in the century where he lived and demand of him neither the phrases nor the social techniques which belong to the late nineteenth and the present century. But withal, to Wesley salvation was social. Men were saved to become the centers of salvation. He was developing in society a remnant, a minority whose departure from the prevailing paganism was an indictment of the sinfulness of society and an evidence of the ameliorability of life when sins were forsaken and the love of God became the motivation of personal experience. Without straining the implications of Wesley's main doctrinal theses, it can be clearly discerned that when he took such bold attitudes and spoke and wrote on

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certain pending public issues and reforms he was distinctly campaigning for God. The social note in his gospel was none the less powerful even though it might be more implicit than explicit.

Consider, for example, Wesley's attitude toward the people, the masses with whom he lived and worked. He regarded every man as a child of God. To the upper classes of the nation they were tools, slaves upon whose tired shoulders their boon of privilege rested. Even the Established Church had turned away from the multitude and was coddling the privileged and the socially élite. But Methodism went to the common people with a gospel that valued men in the light of their divine inheritance. To the Methodist preacher they were souls for whom Christ died. And this was proclaimed to the very mob that would drive Wesley from the Commons where he was preaching. It was no otherworldliness which he proclaimed, no religion as an anodyne for a hard and bitter life, but cardinal New Testament virtues that made men good citizens of the commonwealth as well as of the Kingdom of God. He urged his hearers to be honest, temperate, thrifty, patient, active in good works, God-fearing; for in so doing they became the children of light and put away the deeds of darkness. This consuming passion to help men and women into

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the knowledge of God and love for their fellow men literally drove John Wesley from one end of England to another. If this ethical gospel, fired by a redemptive passion, did not turn aside the tides of revolt and save England from the bloodshed of the French Revolution, it did build into the English masses a sense of dignity and worth that was the foundation upon which a social renaissance found it possible to build in a day later than Wesley. Methodism was laying, in a dark and brutish age, the mud sills of a democratic and socially sensitive era that was to follow as surely as effect follows cause or the day the night.

The extent to which this contribution of early English Methodism toward a broad and beneficent altruism is being recognized by the students of social movements is most assuring. Quietly and persistently the yeast of religious idealism was working in the structure of social life. H. D. Traill, in his extensive study entitled *Social England*, clearly sets forth this impact of the Wesleyan movement on social thinking:

In the nation at large, the Methodist Revival brought about a new moral enthusiasm which, rigid and pedantic as it often seemed, was healthy in its social tone, and whose power was seen in the decrease of the profligacy which had disgraced the upper classes, and the foulness which had infested literature ever since the Restoration. . . . A pas-

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sionate impulse of human sympathy with the wronged and afflicted was the special glory of religion at the end of the eighteenth century, and it has a right to claim the honour of training and inspiring those uncanonized yet true saints—Wilberforce, Clarkson, and John Howard.¹

It would be easy to overlook the significance of the religious movement inaugurated by the Wesleys, from the standpoint of its social values. Leaving aside Methodism as a religious experience, we can quickly see in how many fundamental ways it made a unique contribution to the general welfare of the English people. We must recall that the level of prevailing intelligence was low, that newspapers and books were not in general distribution, that news traveled mostly by word of mouth, and that the intelligent traveler was a vehicle of public knowledge, eagerly welcomed in any community. When we recall that Mr. Wesley alone traveled an average of nearly five thousand miles a year during his lifetime, and that these journeys were in many instances on unbeaten trails and that everywhere he went he spoke to large and varied groups of people, we can scarcely estimate the informative social value of his long ministry. He awakened sluggish minds, stirred sleeping consciences, rebuked accepted evils, and by his own gentility and unruffled poise set

¹ H. D. Traill, *Social England*, V, 410 f.

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an example of the way a Christian gentleman should face life here and hereafter. He was probably the best-read man of his day, but all his Oxford training and his scholarly equipment were freely placed at the service of the lowliest of men. Society is lifted from degradation, not by ethical theories, promulgated by academic theorists, but by men and women who live the good life and translate ideals into the daily stuff of which existence is made. In our day we have such examples as Graham Taylor and Jane Addams who chose to put the gospel to test in daily communal living among the lowly and dispossessed.

Not only did Wesley use to the fullest his pulpit abilities but he was a mighty master of the pen. His *Journal* is as notable a record of common sense and practical wisdom as Benjamin Franklin's *Autobiography*. He was an amazing writer of books. No fewer than seventy came from his prolific pen. These went into hundreds of thousands of homes and were read by multitudes whose hungry and untutored minds quickly responded to the ideas he set forth. The range of these writings covers topics on almost every conceivable subject from *The Character of a Methodist* to *Primitive Physic*; or *An Easy and Natural Method of Curing Most Diseases* and *How Far Is It the Duty of a Christian Minister to Preach Politics?*

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The good life for the masses depends in large measure upon the spread of ethical ideas and upon the prevalence of general intelligence. Wesley was a tireless pamphleteer. If any evil arose he challenged it with a booklet or a leaflet. He was fearless in all these attacks because he rested his case not on his private opinion but on the implications of the gospel he proclaimed. The early Methodist movement was probably the outstanding creative social force in the eighteenth century.

I think before we discuss some of the particular forms of social evil which Wesley attacked, it would be well to pause and watch for a few typical days this strange man in action. His social gospel was no doctrinaire preaching of reform. It was a great compassion that welled up in his heart and found expression in brotherly kindness and active sympathy for the poor and the socially submerged. Wesley had a right to speak on the iniquities of society for he knew them first-hand in his contacts with the hungry and the unemployed. If ever a man deserves the commendation of the Lord in the spirit of the New Testament it was John Wesley, for literally He might have said to him: "I was sick and ye visited me; I was hungry and ye gave me to eat. I was naked and ye clothed me. I was in prison and ye came unto me." All this

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was routine in the life of this man who, like an embodied benevolence, moved in the hovels of the poor and the dark cells of Newgate Prison.

Let me share with you a few excerpts from his *Journal*. He writes on October 1, 1783 (Wesley is eighty): "All my leisure hours, this week I employed in visiting the remaining poor, and in begging for them. Having collected about fifty pounds more, I was enabled to relieve most of those that were in pressing distress."

Two years later, at eighty-two, he writes:

At this season we usually distribute coals and bread among the poor of the Society; but I now considered they wanted clothes as well as food; so on this and the four following days I walked through the town, and begged two hundred pounds, in order to clothe them that wanted it most; but it was hard work, as most of the streets were filled with melting snow, which often lay ankle deep, so that my feet were steeped in snow-water nearly from morning till evening. I held it out pretty well till Saturday evening, when I was laid up with a violent flux, which increased every hour, till at six in the morning, Dr. Whitehead called upon me. His first draught made me quite easy, and three or four more perfected the cure.

Here is a letter to Ebenezer Blackwell which tells how he distributed to the necessities of the saints:

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Dear Sirs:

The money you left in my hands was disposed of as follows:

	£	s	d
To the Lending Stock	2	2	0
To Eliz. Brooks, expecting daily to have her goods seized for rent	1	1	0
To Eliz. Room (a poor widow) for rent	0	5	0
Toward clothing Mary Middleton and another poor woman almost naked	0	10	0
To John Edgar, a poor weaver, out of work ..	0	5	0
To Lucy Jones, a poor orphan	0	2	0
To a poor family, for food and fuel	0	5	0
To Christopher Brown, out of business	0	2	6
To an ancient woman in great distress	0	2	6
Distributed among several sick families	0	10	0
	—	—	—
	5	5	0
	—	—	—

And as an old man eighty-four he records, without the slightest trace of self-pity, the following entry in the dead of an English winter: "Monday the 8th and four following days, I went abegging for the poor. . . . Much good was done with two hundred pounds, and many sorrowful hearts made glad." Small wonder that he was the best-loved man in all England when he died in poverty, having made many

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rich. We are disturbed sometimes because we are aware that Methodism in this day has lost much of her touch with the poor. The charity that we distribute is usually dispensed through a rather impersonal committee. Our absentee unconcern for the widow and the fatherless may at last tinge our church life with selfishness and neutralize that warm-hearted sympathy that is so essential an element in preaching the gospel to the poor and healing the brokenhearted. From the point where Jesus began his ministry in the synagogue of Nazareth Methodism had best not far depart.

Let us look now at some of the specific social causes to which early Methodism gave bold and effective espousal. And let it be said that when Methodism was thus speaking, she stood almost alone in opposition. To denounce public evils has never been popular. In Wesley's day it was almost unheard of for the clergy to venture upon such dangerous topics. We are all familiar with the story of how John Wesley was forbidden to preach in the pulpits of the Church of England. They would not stand for his unorthodox views and forced upon him one of the most acute personal problems he ever confronted. Should he surrender his convictions in order to save their conventions? Or should he maintain that the right to speak

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could not be denied even by the Church itself? He chose to assert the inalienable right to freedom of speech which is the spirit and substance of the democratic process. Today we accept in our English-speaking world free speech, free assembly, a free press, the elementary right of men to hear the truth fearlessly spoken, but we may pause to pay our tribute to the men who, in a less democratic day, first boldly exercised these liberties. What one today witnesses in Hyde Park, London, or Madison Square Garden, New York, had its beginnings in the English-speaking world when John Wesley preached the gospel to the multitudes on the Commons of Bristol or challenged with the law the right of magistrate or mob to deny him the privilege of proclaiming his views. Methodism was not born in a dim religious atmosphere but under the open sky and on the good earth. It smelled not of holy water and altar incense, but rather of the clean winds that blew across the plains, and of the bodies of tired men and women who labored in mine and mill. Like the message in Galilee, it was largely an open-air gospel.

Wesley and the early Methodists were pioneers in the temperance movement. Early Methodism was the relentless foe of alcoholic liquor. Wesley wrote to his followers: "Touch no dram. It is liquid fire. It

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is a sure though slow poison. It saps the very springs of life." He calls all those who sell it for beverage purposes "poisoners general" and declares that they "murder His Majesty's subjects by wholesale." If someone argues that Wesley's opposition to the traffic was based, not so much on the evil itself, but rather because it consumed corn that should have been available for food, he does not lessen the force of Wesley's position. The economic indictment of the liquor business is still unanswerable. That the American people spend four billion dollars a year for alcoholic beverages while men go without food and children starve and freeze, is a sin against God and an indictment of our social intelligence that no modern Methodist preacher should overlook or fail to condemn.

Supporting evidence for the position of original Methodism on the temperance cause can be found in all our *Disciplines* from the earliest days down to the present. While the practice and attitude of our forefathers does not square with our present absolute position on intoxicants, one thing is clear: Methodism was forever blazing a trail and taking successively higher ground on the sale and consumption of alcoholic beverages. Once again she pioneered against an intrenched iniquity and lifted a banner that her children in this age dare not lower.

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We must say a word about early Methodism and slavery. Wesley's interest in this social curse began long before the activities of Wilberforce. In 1772 he refers to "that execrable sum of all villainies, commonly called the Slave Trade." The basis for his attitude toward slavery can be gathered from his inquiry in one of his pamphlets, entitled *Thoughts on Slavery*: "Are not these also the work of Thine own hands, the purchase of Thy Son's blood? Let their complaint come up before Thee." We are doubtless more familiar with Wesley's letter to Wilberforce, written only four days before his death, in which he encourages him in his crusade against slavery and urges him to be "not weary in well-doing. Go on, in the name of God and of His Might, till even American slavery (the vilest thing that ever saw the sun) shall vanish away." Here again was a great human cause, based on a paganistic conception of personality, that felt the force of Wesley's crusading condemnation. All his life he fought it and urged definite social action to destroy the traffic in human beings.

Concerning war the founder of Methodism made many references. He always denounced it as a madness and a barbarity. While not accepting the extreme pacifist viewpoint, he did say that "wherever war breaks out, God is forgotten." We must remem-

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ber this was an early day. War was regarded as a political necessity. It was the accepted method by which international relationships were adjusted. Its heroes were the idols of the people, and few indeed there were who questioned its inevitableness or its essential nobility. But Wesley denounces it in a sermon on "National Sins and Miseries." True to his theological approach to social problems, his most devastating indictment of the war system comes in his treatise on "The Doctrine of Original Sin." I quote a section from it, the terrific thunder of which reminds us of Carlyle:

Whatever be the cause, let us calmly and impartially consider the thing itself. Here are forty thousand men gathered together on this plain. What are they going to do? See, there are thirty or forty thousand more at a little distance. And these are going to shoot them through the head or body, to stab them, or split their skulls, and send most of their souls into everlasting fire, as fast as they possibly can. Why so? What harm have they done to them? Oh, none at all! They do not so much as know them. But a man, who is King of France, has a quarrel with another man, who is King of England. So these Frenchmen are to kill as many of these Englishmen as they can, to prove the King of France is in the right. Now what an argument is this! What a method of proof!

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What an amazing way of deciding controversies! What must mankind be, before such a thing as war could ever be known or thought of upon earth? How shocking, how inconceivable a want must there have been of common understanding, as well as common humanity, before any two Governors, or any two nations in the universe could once think of such a method of decision! If, then, all nations, Pagan, Mohammedan, and Christian, do, in fact, make this their last resort, what farther proof do we need of the utter degeneracy of all nations from the plainest principles of reason and virtue? Men in general can never be allowed to be reasonable creatures till they know not war any more. . . . If even a Heathen were to give an account of an age wherein reason and virtue reigned, he would allow no war to have place therein.

Once again Mr. Wesley is far ahead of his age and adventuring in a socially unpopular cause. His logic makes foolish "The wisdom of the world."

This rapid review by no means covers the multitudinous social activities of Wesley and his followers. The list of books written on the social implications of the Methodist movement is so large as to indicate clearly the social importance of Wesley and his followers. When we add to the topics and causes already considered the fact that Mr. Wesley and the early Methodists organized a savings and loan bank, started

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an unemployment bureau, conducted a charity school, organized a free dispensary, ran an orphans' home, pleaded for prison reform, established a Home for Poor Widows, supported a Strangers' Friend Society for indigent strangers, we stand amazed at the range of their social service. We are equally impressed with the effective techniques to which, in that early day, their good hearts seem unfailingly to have led them. In most instances we still carry on our social programs by ways and methods strangely similar to Wesley's programs of social action.

The social gospel as we know it today, with its implications for conduct and preaching, has come into existence during the last half-century. But it has come to a commanding place in the Christian message. Our social structure becomes more complex with every passing decade, and ethical problems are becoming more and more delicate and involved. Our modern society is sick and its ailments grow little better although its physicians increase in number and in weirdness of remedies. Our social illness cannot be cured by a shot in the arm, any more than it can by an unintelligent, although benevolent, optimism of the "God's-in-his-heaven" type. Something fundamental is needed. And the world looks to religion to

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supply the vision and guidance. It is the prophets who must lead the way.

No church of Jesus Christ can claim to represent the full gospel of the Kingdom that does not accept and fulfill its prophetic mission as the herald and exemplar of social righteousness. No theological aloofness, however brilliant or orthodox, can any longer be accepted. Nor can any pietistic or monastic absorption in the aesthetics of worship meet the issue. And the church that spends its major energies in organizational routines cannot expect a cordial reaction from its serious-minded constituency. The world, knowing its own weakness, expects the Church to press constantly for the ideal and move society out of the jungles and along its way toward harmonious adjustments and cosmic reconstruction. The Church today cannot evade its responsibility for the kind of world that shall follow on the heels of this one.

This does not mean that the preacher must be an expert in social administration or economic theory. He rates higher than these levels. In the name of God he judges all principles and seeks to relate all conduct to the standard that is set forth in the New Testament. If he must keep out of politics because he is inexpert, the horde of selfish politicians, living in their own glass houses, should be careful of

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the stones they throw at the parsons. The pulpit has no corner on social ignorance.

I make bold to insist that Methodism has a heritage in social reform which she cannot evade. The social atmosphere is indigenous to Methodism. Her whole tradition is characterized and determined by a sense of responsibility for the welfare of society. Her individualistic, experiential emphasis is a part of a more inclusive gospel which takes in every fundamental moral concern of humanity. Sometimes the outside public has been quicker to recognize this relationship than our own membership, but the urgency of this hour is challenging the people called Methodists to face a distraught and broken world with a healing gospel that has in it the essence of a new world order. We must accept and meet our responsibilities for the full, abundant life of men everywhere. No smaller task can pay our debt to history, to our generation, or to God.

I lay upon this new Methodism the obligation and challenge of its social responsibility. No great church today can claim a determinative role in this dramatic hour of the world life that does not profoundly dedicate itself to the hazardous business of building a new order. We are witnessing a sorry spectacle of world-wide distrust, vengeance, and cruelty. A deep feeling

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of injustice clamors at the halls of judgment. Ancient good has become uncouth, and empires, economic, national, or international, built on the principle that to the victor belong the spoils, tremble today because their foundations are slipping. A world revolution is in actual process before our eyes. The very nature of civilization seems to be hanging in the balance. The death rattle of a dying world mingles with the birth pangs of an era about to be born. To be alive in a time like this is baffling, but to be a member, and mayhap a minister, in the Church of God is almost terrifying. For, mistake it not, the Church cannot escape from this maelstrom of a tumbling universe. She may be burnt like stubble in the conflagration or she may be like a bulwark in the midst of crumbling citadels. It may be too late. What we have builded on the foundation of Christ may be unworthy of the high destiny that challenges it. It will be tested by fire. At any rate, it is time to hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches.

I wonder if we have a place for the prophet in our midst. The priest, the shepherd, the administrator are assured of a hospitable home in our ecclesiasticism. They are all essential to the ongoing of our program and they are such comfortable people to have around. But prophets are angular and disturbing; they insist

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occasionally on upsetting the saints and sometimes their unpredictable utterances imperil the budget. But we dare not make the security of the budget or the unruffled composure of the believers the tests of the Christian character of the church. There must be room for the prophetic voice among us if we are to be kept sensitive to our shortcomings and prepared for dangerous commitments to Christ's way in the days ahead. The background of our Methodism is not uncongenial to the rise of prophetic spirits in our midst. Our peril in this matter is not so much the paucity of these forward-looking leaders; it is rather the possibility that they may be stifled in the ecclesiastical process or made tame by the all-too-prevalent conservatism of the unintelligent but influential layman who has a considerable stake in the preservation of the social and economic status quo. But Methodism has a mission that is both perilous and difficult, and we shall not be able to meet God's expectation of us in this fresh hour of our history if we allow the prophetic spirit of our ministry to be muffled, or that fine carelessness about precedent and pride, that is the secret of all adventurous pioneering, to be tempered down into the stable inanities of a "safety-first" gospel. Methodism must guard her soul and offer hos-

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pitality within her borders to every creative spirit that rises in her midst.

The period in which Methodism rose to power was a time in which society in England was in sharp transition. Woodrow Wilson in his brilliant brochure, *John Wesley's Place in History*, puts this trenchantly:

The spiritual hunger of men was manifest, their need of the church, their instinct to be saved. The time was ready and cried out for a spiritual revival. The church was dead and Wesley awakened it; the poor were neglected and Wesley sought them out; the gospel was shrunken into formulas and Wesley flung it fresh upon the air once more in the speech of common men; the air was stagnant and fetid; he cleared and purified it by speaking always and everywhere the word of God; and men's spirits responded, leaped at the message, and were made wholesome as they comprehended it. It was a voice for which they had waited, though they knew it not. It would not have been heard had it come untimely. It was the voice of the century's longing heard in the mouth of this one man more perfectly, more potently, than in the mouth of any other—and this man a master of other men, a leader who left his hearers wiser than he found them in the practical means of salvation. And so everything that made for the regeneration of the times seemed to link itself with Methodism.

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Are we in such an era now? Is not God getting ready for a new world? As he seemed to have thrust forth the Wesleys in the fullness of time that they might guide to a better century that was coming to birth, is it beyond comprehension that he may be searching now for a vehicle through which he can reinterpret his unwearying purposes for mankind? Is it possible that united Methodism was born in the one war-free democracy at this particular moment in history for a providential purpose beyond our present seeing? The world cannot go on this way and it can be built anew only by the power of religion. God may be brooding over the hearts of men now to discover those responsive individuals or those believing groups within the Universal Church who can furnish the spear point of his crusade for a brave and better world.

We may well recognize that any involvement we may have in this divine revolution will be fraught with peril. I mention three areas of the social life of our times that stand today desperately in need of bold and Christian guidance. In each area the Church holds the indispensable word.

Everywhere the dignity and glory of human life is imperiled. Millions of men and women and little children are rudely torn from their homes and driven out

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upon the mercy of a heartless public for no crime of their own, but the political and racial exigencies of the state make them the innocent victims of a mad nationalism. Physical bondage has been diminishing, but mental and spiritual slavery is today more rife than at any time in history. Concentration camps, regimented industry, lurid propaganda, a shackled press—all these make men pawns in a universal Armageddon. The individual withers. The state becomes strong. Can the good world of tomorrow be built with the depreciated currency of human individualism that is so essential to this mad carnival of hate? We know it cannot. There must be some voice that shall cry aloud, "Son of man, stand upon thy feet," and there must be some advocate of the essential worth and dignity of persons as such, regardless of the blood in their veins or the money in their pockets. But this undermines the philosophy upon which the political structure of our present world rests and it will be resisted unto death by all those whose creed of nationalism, racialism, and empire have brought this generation unto judgment. Only religion can rescue humanity from its selfish despoilers.

Nor can the good world be built on our present economic inequalities. This is not the place to discuss capitalism, or communism, or socialism. But the very

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emergence in our times of so many desperate economic philosophies reveals the instability and the injustice of our present social order. There is plenty of food, plenty of work, plenty of culture, but the vast majority of the people on earth are hungry, are ungainfully employed, and are overburdened and ignorant. God never intended that so much of his wealth should be held by so few of his children, and He who heard the cry of the poor and the downtrodden in an ancient day will not spare any economic system that enriches a favored minority and consigns to poverty and unspeakable sorrows the vast majority of the peoples of the world. The Kingdom of God is not meat and drink, but it is righteousness and justice, and where these exist men will not go hungry nor feel their spirits withering within them. You say this is no concern of the Church, that we must go on preaching our gospel of salvation and it will all come out in the end. Well, it hasn't all come out and it will not until a new philosophy of goods is substituted for the predatory selfishness that characterizes our present economic order. And these revolutionary concepts are the fundamentals of the New Testament gospel committed to us by Jesus Christ as the very stuff out of which a new Kingdom is to be built upon the earth. Dare we offer ourselves to God to help build

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a new economic pattern for tomorrow's world? If we are not willing to share that cross with him, how can we claim a share in his victory that must come when his people shall be willing in the day of his power?

Once again, who will battle for peace? War is the scourge of our humanity. It denies every concept for which Christ stood. It is the antithesis of the Christian gospel. And yet today its terror dominates every human scene in every so-called civilized land. Is its recurring visitation to plague every succeeding generation? The answer to that question lies more nearly with the Christians of the world than with any other group. The Church of Jesus Christ has not earned the right to a warless world. We have so compromised, we have so equivocated that we have been rather the sanctifiers of military struggle than the avowed opponents of the strife. We have not dared trust our Christian principles beyond a certain safe point. We have been confused as to where loyalty to the state ends and loyalty to God begins. We have watered down our pacifism until it looks pale by the side of the blood of Christ shed to authenticate the practicality of resisting not evil. I presume that upon few questions today is there less unanimity in the Church than on peace and war. It was ever so in

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every crisis. We are strong for peace when the lamb and the lion lie down together, but we are keen for war when the lion turns upon the lamb. I leave us to our judgment, but I remind us all that we have not yet done away with the Man of Galilee, and if we are ever to build a new heaven and a new earth it will not be patterned after a military communique of Herod Antipas but rather upon the bold lines of the Sermon on the Mount.

And so Methodism comes again into the picture of God's unfolding purposes. It will be tragic if we spend our time and strength counting our membership rolls, realigning the structure of our ecclesiastical polity, and crying peace when there is no peace. The mute, inarticulate longing of the eighteenth century found a voice in John Wesley, philanthropist, reformer, prophet of God. Do we who are his spiritual children hear the "still sad music of humanity" beating in our ears today, and will we ride forth to break conventions, to defy stubborn conservatism, to know only the will of God in the twentieth century as he knew it in the eighteenth? Upon the answer to that question will rest what God can do through Methodism, today, for tomorrow.

V

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THE WESLEYS HAD BRAINS. FROM THE STANDPOINT of scholarship and erudition John Wesley chose wisely his parents. Samuel Wesley, although politically irregular and financially inept, was a man of no mean intellect. His somewhat somber figure fits better into the eighteenth century than the twentieth, but he was a clergyman of deep and stubborn conviction, a student of high themes, a father for whom his illustrious sons always had respect if not filial affection. Wesley's mother was the brilliant daughter of a famous Dissenting clergyman and possessed a mind of superior quality and amazing range. Her prodigious maternal duties seemed never to smother the fire of a mind that was natively at home in the profound depth of spiritual truth. Her letters to her children reveal masterful insights into life; she wrote three elementary books on Christian theology for the instruction of her children, and her disputations on political and religious subjects with her husband and her sons reveal a mind that had few equals among the women of England in her day. The children inherited these

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mental traits. Their letters show a delicate richness of feeling. Hetty was reading the Greek Testament at eight and Martha was a valued friend of Dr. Johnson. Although the family at Epworth was continually pinched by poverty, they kept the lamp of learning ablaze in every growing mind that found a place around the Wesley hearthstone.

It was out of that kind of a background that John Wesley went to Charterhouse and later on to a fellowship at Oxford. We must never forget that Wesley's was a disciplined mind trained in philosophy, theology, and in Latin and Greek and Hebrew. His scholarship was recognized by his appointment to be a fellow at Lincoln College. It is interesting to note in the classical circles of Oxford today a growing, though belated, appreciation of the distinction which the name of John Wesley is bringing to his university college.

When we examine critically the mind of Wesley we find it very keen, very logical, very practical—no learning for learning's sake, but a passionate devotion to truth because it held implications for character and social well-being. The courage of Wesley's theological positions made his preaching in the university church during his Fellowship a sensation in academic circles, but he loved the truth more than con-

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ventional popularity, and his boldness shut many a door in his face. We are somewhat nonplused when we read Wesley's sermons today and recall the stirring scenes that followed their delivery. There is a real contrast between the even and measured logic of his discourse and the effect which such tempered words would be expected to produce. We are fortunate to have so many of these discourses in printed form. They serve to protect the Methodist movement from the superficial indictment of being a shallow emotional flare that had no rootage in intelligence and basic theological beliefs. Wesley gave the people the best he had. He did not talk down to his crowd. When the meeting was over and the excitement had subsided there was always a residuum of sound sense and of stirring ideas left in the mind of the crowd that had gathered to hear this English scholar who was on fire for God. It is to be capitably doubted if Methodism would have survived as an expanding and increasingly fruitful religious movement if, in addition to its fervor, it had not had sound intellectual substance as the dominant quality of its preaching. And we may reasonably infer that if it ever loses the sound integrity of its intellectual strength it will not long be able to maintain its spiritual vigor and effectiveness.

It may be embarrassing to us modern Methodist

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preachers but it cannot be other than edifying to glance at the sheer intellectual curiosity and passion for learning that obsessed these early founders of our Church. Francis Asbury came to this country when twenty-two years of age with very limited schooling. In the midst of his arduous itineration all over the eastern half of the United States he managed to acquaint himself with a reading knowledge of the Greek and Hebrew languages in order that he might the better interpret the Scriptures to his wilderness pioneer audiences. The laborious achievement is almost unbelievable. John Wesley was the master of ten languages. Read the list and let your amazement subdue your pride: Arabic, Hebrew, Greek, Latin, French, Italian, Spanish, German, Dutch, English. Remember now that Wesley traveled from forty-five hundred to five thousand miles a year on foot, on horseback, or in a carriage. Much of his reading was done while riding along the countryside on the back of a horse. We recall that when he got too feeble to ride a horse, his friends provided a chaise. He at once boarded up one side and filled that side with books. Then he put in a table that he might write as he rode along. When he was past seventy he gave up writing in "the rumbling old coach" for fear the continued effort might injure his eyes! He wrote a four-volume history of

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England; he edited a fifty-volume collection of religious documents known as "The Christian Library," every word of which came under his personal attention. Wesley's *Journal* is one of the most interesting and minute chronicles of the century, and his prose style is as powerful and precise as Swift's. He wrote a commentary on the New Testament, several volumes of sermons, and pamphlets and small books without number. If in one lifetime he had done naught else but read the books he read and produce the literary contributions that came from his pen, he would have been a notable man in any generation. And yet he found time for all this in the midst of a program of amazingly diverse proportions. Scant comfort is here to be found for the preacher of today who finds difficulty in reading a dozen books a year! No wonder our preaching often goes stale and the best minds in our community do not expect any longer to find much intellectual stimulus in the average pulpit. Father Wesley's admonition, "Leisure and I have parted company," might well stab us awake with reproach for our intellectual sloth.

In estimating the contribution of Methodism to the eighteenth century our attention needs to be called to the effect which the widespread preaching program had upon the general level of intelligence in England.

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There were no public schools, no libraries, few newspapers, and when as well-informed and fluent a traveler as John Wesley came to town a crowd soon gathered. His discourses were intellectually stimulating as well as religiously uplifting. Then he was always distributing books, tracts, and pamphlets. Early Methodism knew the value of the printing press and cheap, widely distributed literature. We may remark in passing that the simplicity and directness of style in Wesley's speech and prose had a marked effect upon the prevailing modes in literary style, which were at that time stilted and highly artificial.

It is said that Methodist hymn-singing made England "a nest of singing birds." Charles Wesley put the people to singing the doctrines which his brother John proclaimed in formal theological form. This "Moody-Sankey" combination was a blessing. Charles, and John for that matter, wrote an unbelievable number of hymns. Most of them were of transient value, but a few belong immortally to every age and every faith. The world can never pay its debt to the men like Charles Wesley and Isaac Watts from whose hearts came such noble hymns as "Jesus, Lover of my soul," "When I survey the wondrous cross," "Jesus! the Name high over all," "Love divine, all loves excelling," "Hark! the herald angels sing,"

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"Christ the Lord is risen today." It has been well said that the hymns of Methodism lifted the whole of English psalmody to a new level.

Real education rests upon the free interchange of ideas. Unless there is freedom of speech there can be no assurance of liberty and free institutions. John Wesley maintained the right of protest against any doctrine or any evil which in his judgment was calculated to do harm. Neither pope nor king nor bishop could shut his mouth. "If any man, bishop or other, ordain that I should not do what God commands me to do, to submit to that ordinance would be to obey man rather than God." When Wesley had his famous interview with Butler, the Bishop of Bristol, that able and devout prelate said to Wesley, "You have no business here, you are not commissioned to preach in this diocese. Therefore I advise you to go hence." Mr. Wesley answered, "My lord, my business on earth is to do what good I can. Wherever, therefore, I think I can do most good, there I must stay as long as I think so. At present I think I can do most good here; therefore, here I stay."

By his spirit and his untrammelled utterances he did much to give a voice to a century that was emerging out of stupid servility into personal and social awareness. Much of the freedom we have today in the

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English-speaking world goes back to those early days when men like Wesley claimed for the common man a voice in public affairs and a share in directing their own destinies. We must not forget that it was out of England itself that there came men who demanded of a decadent government the inalienable rights of freedom and independence. And many Englishmen admitted the validity of the American protest.

But you cannot have free speech without tolerance and you cannot create an intelligent society without both. And here we come to a contribution which Wesley made that it is difficult to overestimate. For Wesley's tolerance went beyond the usual range of toleration that characterizes most religious leaders. He tolerated in others positions which were to him abominable. He was a thorough Protestant but he insisted upon full toleration for the Roman Catholics in England. "I persecute no man for his religious principles. Let there be as boundless a freedom in religion as any man can conceive." Bishop McConnell closes his remarkable book on John Wesley with the quotation of a letter from a man named Robinson who writes of hearing Mr. Wesley in October, 1790, less than six months before "the very springs of life at last stood still." In this letter he described a sermon he had just heard. Among other descriptions,

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this: "His discourse was short—the Text I could not hear. After the last prayer, he rose up and addressed the people on Liberality of Sentiment, and spoke much against refusing to join with any Congregation on account of difference in opinion. He said, 'If they do but fear God, work righteousness, and keep his commandments, we have nothing to object to.' "

We are quite familiar with his friendly tolerance to certain individual Unitarians, for whose central doctrine he had no respect but for whose blameless and radiant Christian life he had only admiration. And this catholicity of mind and generosity of heart is all epitomized in the well-known statement, "If your heart is as my heart, give me your hand."

The fact is, the Methodists were never guilty of that narrowness or bigotry that might easily have characterized so singular and rigid a branch of Christendom. Wesley insisted that there was no other religious society under heaven which "required nothing of candidates for admission except a desire to save their souls." He insisted that "the Methodists alone do not insist on your holding this or that opinion; but they think and let think." Methodism has carried at its heart this liberal tradition through the centuries.

To Robert Raikes is commonly attributed the credit

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for creating the first Sunday school, and while he may certainly be accorded the honor of being the father of the modern movement, it still remains true that the Methodists distinctly anticipated Raikes. As early as 1769 Hannah Ball, a Methodist of High Wycombe, had set up a regular school for children where they met every Sunday. Wesley records in his *Journal* in 1784, after visiting a Sunday school in Bingley: "I find these schools springing up wherever I go. Perhaps God may have a deeper end therein than men are aware of. Who knows but some of these schools may become nurseries for Christians?" Such they did become, and the end of God has become manifest throughout all the earth.

To what high level does this momentum of mentality in Methodism lead us? It was a strange coincidence that this religious movement which was so intimately at home among the poor and the ignorant should be characterized by an emphasis upon learning and high thinking that was integral and fundamental in its whole approach to its task. It was thus delivered from the shallows of mere enthusiastic emotionalism, and became a factor of no mean proportions in raising the intelligence level of the eighteenth century. This background of our early history seems clearly to point

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to certain attitudes and principles that should be found in our Methodism today.

First, we must be sure not to get educated away from the people. While it is true to say that Methodism was born in a university, it is equally true to say that its home throughout its life has been in the heart of the multitude. There was no conscious conflict between the highest learning and the deepest piety. Wesley never traded on the ignorance of people or exalted a blind, emotionalized response to his preaching. He took people where he found them and lifted them to undreamed of heights of devotion and intelligence. Today the Methodists have much more education than their fathers. If it ministers only to their pride and puts a barrier between them and the untutored multitude, then knowledge becomes a curse, a vain oblation to our ecclesiastical sophistication. It is folly to say we need ignorant men to lead ignorant men. No thought is too lofty to escape captivity to Christ, and the knowledge of the deep things of God is a trust to be shared with those who walk in the humbler paths of understanding. Knowledge is never power until it is touched by a sense of stewardship and encircled by the sacrificial will of God. If the sap from the soil of men's need and men's heart-hunger does not continually surge through the trunk

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of Methodism, we shall surely die of academic dry rot. We all believe in education, but education that knows not the heart of God's eternal passion for the wayward and the dispossessed is a bane and not a blessing. The feet that walk our shaded cloisters of learning must also tread the dusty highway along which men struggle out of poverty and ignorance into the life and light that is God. If we know more than our fathers we must love more deeply and serve more unselfishly.

I do not believe in the superior power of ignorance. I do not think that superstition and hokum are the attractions that draw to Pentecostal tents great crowds of people who once attended our own revival meetings. If we would go where the people are, preach with the same fire and earnestness, and be content to ignore the criticism of our more aristocratic members, we would have a message that would grip and stir these multitudes while we give them a sound doctrine that is not repudiated by an intelligent understanding of the New Testament. The only people that seem to care much for them are self-appointed evangelists whose doctrines of literalism and adventism are an offense to thoughtful people. But here is this great throng of the unshepherded for whose souls' salvation we have a responsibility but to whose minds we likewise owe a debt that they may know the

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Word of God and the way of eternal life with intelligence and enduring power.

May I hazard another reflection from this historic background? We cannot and we should not preach like Wesley. But I could wish that there were the same kind and amount of substance in our sermons that we find in his. He was never trivial, casual, merely contemporaneous. He was developing a fundamental thesis in each sermon. We can almost build a theological framework of doctrine by a study of his printed discourses. Our sermons lack theological background and content. They are light and shift with each varying wind. They lay no deep hold upon the centers of being. With all our broader intellectual privilege we skim along the surface of men's minds and do not plow deep enough to get down to the realm where the issues of life really rest. Our sermons today need greater girth, more cosmic relationship, more range and depth. If the modern Methodist pulpit becomes merely an echo of the babbling superficiality of this childish age, then it is doomed to perish through its own shallowness. Ours is the high duty to lead men deeper than they think and higher than they live. We need to rediscover the intellectual responsibility of the pulpit.

It is stimulating to recall how long we have been at

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this task of religious education. From a little group of ragged children gathered off the streets of London into the Foundry to be taught their letters and the elementary knowledge of the Bible, to our modern scientific program of religious education, is a long call. But we have been at it, in one fashion or another, ever since. It is no wonder then that the theological implications of the program of Christian nurture made no stir in our Church when they became clear during the early part of this century. Methodism moved over into the new program without a jar and easily became a pioneer in the field of the Christian education of youth. Today that program is unexcelled in the Christian world. And the future belongs to those groups which can combine an honest and fearless educational approach with a fervent and unceasing evangelical emphasis. Our church schools are schools for the building of character. They exist, in countless communities, for the creation of Christ-like personalities. Hence we need skilled workmen, trained teachers, but over and above this we need the loving heart and the Christ-centered life. Into what a glorious heritage this vast group of teachers and leaders in our program of religious education has entered! To them is committed the building of the mind of Christ into the accepting will of each

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succeeding generation of childhood and youth, and they will enter into their reward when today's children become tomorrow's heralds of a new and better world. The message of Methodism will come to beautiful flowering in the life of many a child because some humble and unnoticed teacher has been true to her divine vocation and led that child into the welcome presence of Christ.

One of the alarming conditions confronting our public is the widespread ignorance of the Bible. The materialistic and secular bent of our modern life, the hectic, driven pace of our crowded days, the loss of the ancient family altar, the critical mood of much of our modern scholarship, have all combined to depreciate the place of the Word in the life of our people. The proposition is hardly open to argument that no nation can endure and fulfill its divine mission that persistently ignores the revelation of God in the Holy Scriptures. The neglect of the Bible brings in its train a host of attendant evils. Our fathers took as their commission the task of spreading "scriptural holiness over these lands." Methodism today should take her place in the vanguard of those forces in our public life that are working unabashed to put the Bible again in the center of our thinking and living. If this means working out a system of public educa-

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tion that recognizes the central and essential place of the Scriptures in all true education, we should boldly espouse it. Almost any price can we afford to pay, any of the marks of our sinful sectarianism can we afford to repudiate, if only we can deliver our generation from the spiritual illiteracy that characterizes it.

The Methodist movement had hardly started before it began founding schools. It was a bold and adventurous enterprise to which they gave themselves. Kingswood and Cokesbury and a score more of those early efforts at Christian education bear testimony to the passionate interest of early Methodism in so-called "higher education." Do we still have a mission in this field or has the general advance in learning and the widening function of the state in education relieved the Church of this part of its responsibility? It all depends upon what we mean by education. If it is only the acquisition of knowledge then the question may be open, but if by education we mean the development of the totality of the human personality, the releasing for self-expression and service of all the physical, mental, and moral capacities of the individual, then the religionist can no more vacate his high responsibility in such a process than the scientist or the pedagogue.

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The fact is our whole educational process stands in need of an infusion of spiritual dynamics. It is efficient in pedagogic skills, it operates with superb material equipment, but the product it turns out has no vital and satisfying philosophy of life. The graduate turns back to the school and asks, "So what?" The lack of a Christian motivation leaves the man educated by our modern schools too often confused and baffled by a universe that can be discerned only by spiritual insight and mastered only by spiritual power. At no point do secularism and pagan materialism threaten our social order any more insidiously or perilously than in public education that bows God out of the classroom and discovers its moral codes in the dubious mores of our modern life. The day may come when Christian idealism may come into its rightful place in our public educational system, but until that day the Church must be forever sounding aloud its insistence that no one is truly educated until he knows those spiritual and moral codes by which humanity has climbed out of the jungle into the higher levels of decent social living.

The Church has another distinctive contribution to make to the problem. The church-related college is one of the few remaining citadels of freedom. Any system of education that is dependent upon public

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patronage and the appropriations of politically-minded legislatures is in continual peril of its free spirit. The increasing regimentation of life has not passed America by. More and more we are being caught in the toils of an overhead supervision that dictates the viewpoint of the classroom, that quenches the fire of the free mind, that tempers the enthusiasm of the social pioneer and effectually curbs free criticism which is the only path to progress. Indications point to the accentuation of this drift in spite of our vocal lip-service to the spirit of democracy. The endowed private schools and the church-supported institutions of higher learning are the last stronghold of the free spirit in our social order. Here truth can be pursued without the damning handicap of expediency; here freedom of speech may exercise its right without imperiling the appropriation; here the searching spirit of the social explorer may seek a new Kingdom of Man whose builder and maker is God without being penalized because he does slight obeisance to intrenched privilege and accepted economic tyrannies.

But the Christian college can fulfill its duty only as it guards its own soul. If it knows religion only as a form and not as a power, if its religious program is hobbled by devotion to the uncouth forms of a by-

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gone day, if it teaches the Bible but is careless about the ethical quality of its athletic program and is long on chapel exhortations and short on personal radiance in its instructors, then it contributes to spiritual disillusionment and betrays, under the unctuous cloak of piety, the high educational opportunity to which it is called by both the Church and the world.

We seem to be in a race between chaos and education. Just at present chaos seems to be gaining on us. But the future belongs to the powers of light and not to the forces of darkness. The enlightened mind will overcome at last the brutish spirit. But there is no mechanistic evolution which will bring in a new day. It will come as men pay for it with toil and sacrifice and far-visioned planning. Methodism with her broad contacts, her high intelligence, her vast educational endowments, and her untrammelled spirit of honest thinking, may well take her place in the forefront of those social and religious forces that must build out of the chaos of our present world confusion a society of free men whose only restraint is a self-imposed captivity to the discovered will of God and to the pattern of an unfolding universe in which dwelleth truth and righteousness.

VI

Spiritual Discipline and the Culture of Religious Living

THE NAME "METHODIST" WAS GIVEN TO THE LITTLE group at Oxford University because of "the exact regularity of their lives as well as their studies." Their fellow students thought they were abundantly "too scrupulous and too strict." Their regularity of conduct extended not only to religious practices but also to the strict observance of all the statutes of the university. Their conscientiousness was an embarrassment to the more indifferent student body, which observed that if these Methodists were right "few indeed could be saved." Thus the name Methodist came into being as a somewhat derisive designation for a group of students who were exceedingly punctilious in the routine of spiritual discipline and whose practices in this respect set them apart as men devoted to a method of daily living which was motivated by a devout sensitiveness to the will of God. Methodism thus began as an adventure in spiritual discipline.

John Wesley was the acknowledged leader of that

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group, and God had long been preparing him for his insistence upon the "exact regularity" of the Holy Club. The bent toward Methodism came from his childhood training. Susannah Wesley was a believer in many a doctrine that would be repulsive to our more lax modern child psychologists. On his fifth birthday every child in the Wesley household learned to read between daylight and darkness. When John was sent to Charterhouse he was instructed to run around the schoolyard three times every morning, to read the Scriptures, and to say his prayers twice a day. When he was eighteen years old he budgeted his time, allowing periods for study, for correspondence, for prayer and meditation. By the time he was twenty-two the habit of conscientious discipline was fastened upon him and he writes, "I began to take a more exact account than I had done before of the manner wherein I spent my time, writing down how I had employed every hour."

This regimen of body, mind, and spirit on the part of Wesley found its reflection in the religious movement which he dominated during his long lifetime. His followers shared his feeling for the necessity of strict regulation of every personal and group habit. This was no light enterprise in which they were engaged, and every consecrated power must be made

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subject to an ideal that left no place for softness or self-indulgence. Let us look for a little while at the ways in which Wesley with an iron hand, but with a loving and tender heart, ruled the United Societies to the glory of God.

He trained and disciplined his lay preachers. They were in the main unlearned and unlettered, but Wesley demanded of them courses of reading. "I will give each of you, as fast as you will read them, books to the value of five pounds." He insisted that his preachers "contract a taste for reading by use, or return to your trade." They were to arise at four, as he did. From four to five they were to meditate, to pray, and to read the Scriptures. From six in the morning till twelve (allowing an hour for breakfast) they were to read what to us appears rather heavy theological volumes, including his *Notes on the New Testament*. He conducted for them schools of oratory; he taught them how to preach. "Don't ramble," "Never shout," "Choose the plainest texts," and so on.

The "Rules of a Helper," or preacher, were specific, and concerning their meaning not even the simplest-minded exhorter could be in doubt. They were:

1. Be diligent. Never be unemployed a moment. Never be triflingly employed. Never while away time;

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neither spend any more time at any place than is strictly necessary.

2. Be serious. Avoid all lightness, jesting and foolish talk.
3. Converse sparingly and cautiously with women, particularly with young women.
4. Take no step toward marriage without first consulting with your brethren.
5. Believe evil of no one; unless you see it done.
6. Speak evil of no one.
7. Tell everyone what you think wrong in him, and that plainly as soon as may be; else it will fester in your heart.
8. Do not affect the gentleman. You may have no more to do with this character than with that of a dancing master. A preacher of the Gospel is the servant of all.
9. Be ashamed of nothing but sin.
10. Be punctual. Do every thing exactly at the time. And in general, do not mend our rules, but keep them; not for wrath, but for conscience' sake.
11. You have nothing to do but to save souls.
12. Act in all things, not according to your own will but as a son in the Gospel. As such, it is your part to employ your time in the manner which we direct; partly in preaching and visiting from house to house; partly in reading, meditation, and prayer. In short, keep busy and obey our rules! ¹

¹ Quoted in Abram Lipsky, *John Wesley, a Portrait*, pp. 197 f.

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It will not be difficult to guess which of the above injunctions Methodists of this day have seen fit to omit from the General Rules.

Much might be said in detail about the rules of the societies by which Wesley sought to bring about "a ruling habit of soul" and a "recovery of the divine likeness" upon the part of the members. They were to attend services regularly at five o'clock in the morning. He intimates that Methodism will "perish if the five o'clock preaching hour were to be given up." They were to partake of the Sacrament regularly; they were to fast every Wednesday and Friday "in imitation of the practice of the Primitive Church"; they were to attend the class meeting, the love feast, the watch-night, the covenant service. They were to wear "no pearls or precious stones, use no curling of hair, . . . buy nothing made in the very height of fashion." The women were warned against lace and ruffles and the men were advised to wear no shining buckles or buttons or fashionable and expensive perukes. The almost Cromwellian severity of these rules naturally discovered many who were found wanting. The demands were too great for the flesh. Hence many names were dropped from the rolls of the societies. This was a fellowship of those who could "endure hardship, as good soldiers of

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Jesus Christ." It was a society of the elect. Wesley "put away" on his visits of inspection all those who were found unacceptable. Reasons for the expulsion of sixty-four from the society at Chowden are given in his *Journal*, March, 1743. "Two were expelled for cursing and swearing; two for habitual Sabbath breaking; seventeen for drunkenness; two for retailing spirituous liquors; three for quarrelling and brawling; one for beating his wife; three for habitual, wilful lying; three for railing and evil-speaking; one for idleness and laziness; twenty-nine for lightness and carelessness." Not all the early Methodists were saints. From the last item we infer that a religious demeanor was indispensable if one desired to remain a member in good standing.

This discipline of the flesh at times involved suffering. They gave their bodies as a living sacrifice upon the altar. The average early Methodist preacher was a poor insurance risk. They did not last under the privations and physical dangers of so selfless an adventure as preaching the gospel to a hostile mob. Wesley himself set the example for his preachers in this kind of fearless procedure. The mobs pelted him with dirt; they cut open feather beds and strewed the feathers over him; they struck him in the mouth until the blood came; they dragged him from one end of

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the town of Walsan to the other; they yelled, "Kill him," "Knock out his brains." With it all they never ruffled the little Englishman. His rule was always to look a mob in the face and never let them see that he was afraid. His courage awed the unsophisticated and his earnestness won the leaders of the rabble. On good authority we are told that there is hardly a month in the first ten years of his outdoor preaching in which Wesley does not record an attack by a mob.

The physical hardships that these early itinerants endured are almost beyond our imagination. They went in scorn of danger. Twenty, thirty, forty miles they traveled and preached two and three times a day. They were romantic figures in a trainless day. Each one carried a shovel to dig himself out of the snow. The rabble pelted them with mud, stones, and vegetables, beat and threw them into ponds. I think we can see this picture more vividly if we let one of them, Thomas Mitchell, tell in his own quaint words the story of his blessed sufferings:

On Sunday, August 7, last, I preached at Wrangle, at five in the morning as usual; about six, two constables came and carried me to a public house where I was kept till near four in the afternoon. Then one of them said he would go and ask the minister whether they might not let me go [the reference is to a minister of the Church of

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England]. Upon his return, they brought me out to a large mob, who carried me and threw me into a standing water; and as often as I tried to come out, they pitched me in again. At last some of them said I should come out, and kept the others off, till I got up the bank. I found myself very happy all the time; for I knew I was in the Lord's hands. I got back to the house where I lodged, and went to bed. But in less than an hour the mob came again, broke open the doors of the house and the chamber and dragged me away with them. They carried me to a great pond which was railed round, being ten or twelve foot deep. Then four men took me up by my legs and arms. I felt the flesh shrink a little at first, but it was soon over, and I did not care whether I lived or died; just as it pleased the Lord. They swung me backward and forward two or three times and then threw me as far as they could into the water. The fall took away my senses so that I felt nothing more. But some that did not care to have me drowned, when I came above water, catching hold of my clothes with a long pole pulled me out. I lay senseless for some time. When I came to myself, I saw many people about me; one of them helped me up and bade me go with him. He brought me to a little house and put me to bed; but I had not lain long, before the mob came again, pulled me out of bed, and drove me before them, almost naked, to the end of the parish, where they left me. I made shift to get

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on to a place three miles off, where I got to bed again and slept in peace.²

Why should men put up with all these hardships? Only the love of Christ, the measure of whose suffering they were filling up, and the passion for men's souls that burned like a fire in their bones can explain it. But the way out was always open. No man compelled their obedience to these rules and high Puritan standards. Any Methodist preacher could always "locate" if he desired and "cease from traveling," but within the magic circle of the Methodist itinerancy they must obey its rules and pour out their lifeblood like water for the salvation of men and for the redemption of the world.

Does all this seem far away and strange? What rebuttals have been arising in your mind as you have read this recital of those in our Methodist lineage who "through faith subdued kingdoms, wrought righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, quenched the power of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, from weakness were made strong, turned to flight armies of aliens"? What emotion comes to your heart as these simple annals of heroism unfold before your eyes? We dare not treat them lightly with a touch of cynicism. There is here for

² Quoted *ibid.*, pp. 195 f.

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modern Methodism the same inheritance which the New Testament presents to all Christian believers. We have been bought with a price, and Methodism today would not be a living faith if we did not have behind us the deathless devotion of a host of intrepid men and women who endured as seeing Him who is invisible, and purchased for us an inheritance beyond our worthiness and deserving.

It must not be supposed for one moment that Wesley prescribed all these forms and regulations in order to take the pleasure out of life and make Methodists to be morose joy-killers. Far from it. "I am convinced," he writes, "that true religion has nothing sour, austere, unsociable, unfriendly in it; but, on the contrary, implies the most winning sweetness, the most amiable softness and gentleness." We can rationalize these severe disciplines of body and spirit only when we consider the end for which they were prescribed. There was no ascetic virtue in any of them as ends in themselves. In his sermon on "The Means of Grace" he avers that "whosoever imagines there is any intrinsic power in any means whatsoever, does greatly err, not knowing the Scriptures, neither the power of God." The purpose is clear. It is "so to order one's time, strength, and labor that the law of Christ may be fulfilled in him by the renunciation of

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all subordinate love of the world, and to love and obey God with all his strength." If this be too high for our all too easily content lives, let us be reminded that the New Testament is also disturbing in its ideal of singleness of purpose and perfection of love.

The question inevitably arises as to how vital and necessary a part of real religion is such discipline as was practiced by the Methodists of Wesley's day. In answering that question we must be assured that Wesley himself regarded it as an essential element in the Methodist type of piety. He was surrounded on all sides by the travesty of true religion exhibited by priest and people alike. Something different was needed if men were to respect and join these new societies. The new wine could not be poured into the old wineskins. A brand new pattern of the religious life must be set in order that the appeal would be striking and attractive.

We must also remember that the rigidity of Methodist discipline was not congenial to many within the societies. They were human, as we are. This crucifixion of the flesh did not appeal to some of the believers and they soon departed, "having loved this world." The rules of the Societies were maintained with difficulty and only Wesley's iron hand could have

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controlled for spiritual ends the volatile wills of these rather emotional common people. Many members were dismissed from the rolls not only for unchristian acts and attitudes but also for general indifference and spiritual sloth. But the ideal was never compromised, and the "character of a Methodist" was a very definite and exalted standard of life. So ought it to be in this day.

Before we of this easy, pleasure-loving modern day dismiss too lightly the necessity of discipline in Christian living, we might profitably turn with an open mind to the New Testament. For nearly every Methodist practice a scriptural principle can be found. There is nothing in the words of Jesus, or in his own life, that would lead us to believe that the Christian way of life was a way of undisciplined self-indulgence. The very opposite. "Narrow is the gate, and straitened the way, that leadeth unto life, and few are they that find it" (Matthew 7:14). "If any man would come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me" (Matthew 16:24). "Whosoever shall lose his life for my sake shall find it" (Matthew 16:25). "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind" (Matthew 22:37). "Suffer hardships with me, as a good soldier of Christ Jesus" (II

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Timothy 2:3). "They that are in the flesh cannot please God" (Romans 8: 8). "I buffet my body, and bring it into bondage" (I Corinthians 9: 27). And so these injunctions to simplicity of purpose and singleness of life might be almost indefinitely multiplied. Were the Wesleyan Methodists nearer to the spirit of the New Testament than we are today? There is but one answer that an honest person can make. We put garlands on the tombs of the prophets but we recoil from the hardships through which they attained unto their unique and exalted station. The least we can do is not to discredit in our judgment men who have walked by a rule unto which we do not ourselves seem able to attain.

I am not pleading in these lines for monasticism. Nothing was farther from the spirit of Wesley and his followers. They lived their lives, like the Master, along the highways and in the market-places of the world. They were an integral and intimate part of their generation. They did not preserve their piety by withdrawing in monkish seclusion. They carried their religious idealism into the dark and wicked byways of English life and chose to "shine like stars in a darkened sky." You can soon forget the friar in his lonely retreat, but you must come face to face with the regenerated workingman who lives Christ

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amid the grimy dust of a mine or the humble shop on the corner. Methodists gained a place in English life simply because they outlived the average Englishman, and made even the high and mighty respect the integrity and stubborn honesty of their daily lives.

Here is a heritage which it may not be comfortable for us to consider. While the average Methodist to-day will not accept the rigorous asceticism of the earlier days, he is slow to defend his own careless indifference to exacting standards or his all-too-prevalent conformity to this world. Somewhere there must be a common meeting ground between these exalted ideals of a bygone day and the amenities and graces of a richer and more cultured generation. Learning and wealth and higher economic and social levels are not in themselves what Wesley often insisted they were, namely, "the road to hell." He had much scriptural foundation for exposing their peril to spiritual victory, but the abundant life that Jesus came to bring may function in a society of ample social security as truly as in an economic order of poverty and desperation. It is for us to work out these new spiritual techniques by which a philosophy of goods may not be at necessary variance with a philosophy of goodness.

When all this has been said, modern Methodism may

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well look to the discipline of its spiritual life. We are too much conformed to this world, we are too much of the color of our secular environment. We have forfeited our uniqueness, and in the eyes of the world "being a Methodist" portrays no distinguishing characteristics for the individual. Our power in the world would be greatly increased if the quality of our spiritual life were more outstanding and more universally representative of the "people called Methodists." Once we were different because we dared to live above the commonly accepted customs of the day. Now we are sunk in the commonalty of a pervading secularism that scoffs at our ancient Puritanism.

It is my matured conviction that we must come back to a more disciplined order of life. "The world is too much with us. Getting and spending, we lay waste our powers." Greed, self-indulgence, perfumed idleness, the concern for physical beauty, reckless waste, and the endless struggle to be rich dominate far too much of our modern scene. Religion will have to lead us out of this. We cannot serve God and mammon. We must move into the Kingdom of the Spirit or else the disintegration of our lush civilization will land us all in the despair and hopelessness that has historically overtaken every

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nation that has refused the high disciplines of self-control and social regulation.

Methodist practice and ideals in the eighteenth century may seem to us now to be naïve and economically unsound. But over and above the pattern of their regulated and oversimplified living I would like to remind our modern church of some of the standards for which they stood, and suggest that our power and influence for God would be tremendously increased if we would more nearly approach the self-denying spirit of those men and women of a bygone day who sought "first the kingdom of God."

I wish we might discipline ourselves more in the study of the Bible. It was the "one Book" in those days and occupied the central place in the Christian's world. An hour of reading and meditation must begin the day even as early as five o'clock, and much of the power of our fathers came from communion with God in those hushed early hours when all nature enveloped the soul in stillness and God's voice could be heard in the freshness of the morning. What would happen in our Church and in our world if for an hour a day we waited upon the Lord and submitted our tired and tangled souls to the scrutiny of his all-seeing compassion and the cleansing winds of the Spirit? We are overdriven, we are fretful and har-

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ried. We need the peace of communion, the discipline of prayer, the power that comes of lingering in His presence. No wonder we are so flabby and lifeless and uncreative. Our spiritual batteries are exhausted and we have no contact with the Power that is God. We languish in the petty rounds of our inconsequential living, and there is not about our lives that glowing radiance and that strange compulsion that belong to those who have daily walked with God and looked deeply into his face. Much will become clear to us that is now obscure when with habitual joy we open the windows of our souls to the light that streams from his Holy Word.

It seems a commonplace observation to make that Methodism will never mean what it ought to mean in American life until its members have a more sensitive conscience on the subject of church attendance. We have lifted it out of the realm of a necessary means of grace into a whimsical procedure based largely upon our feeling at the moment. A church whose average Sunday morning attendance will not exceed thirty per cent of its enrolled membership will never impress the world with the seriousness of religion or the value of the church to society. The early Methodists did not forsake the assembling of themselves together, and so important was attendance

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upon the class meeting that each member had his "card" and if at the quarterly conference there was evidence of indifference in attendance it became a matter of stern discipline. We may not feel warranted in going so far, but the unconcern of so large a number of professed believers for the services of the sanctuary constitutes an indictment of our spiritual earnestness that explains a good deal of our impotence in community life and also explains the baffling and depressing apathy that characterizes so many church members. Going to church may be a habit but it is a means of grace which if persistently neglected results almost unfailingly in religious indifference and spiritual death. The church cannot maintain its program or accomplish its divine mission with empty pews.

The attitude of Mr. Wesley upon the subject of money and earthly goods is most interesting. Money was precious and its value was greatly enhanced by its scarcity. But John Wesley made a good deal of money in his day. The royalties on his books would have made him a rich man had he hoarded what came into his hands. The profits from one of his books, *Primitive Physic*, brought him £30,000—\$150,000 in American money. All of which he used to buy further copies of the book for free distribution. An

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English authority states that the Methodists in London gave to their poor within ten years \$75,000. And a dollar had more value than now.

The Methodists faced a dilemma in the matter of property and riches. All the virtues of thrift and frugality were a part of their religion. If they possessed these virtues it led almost unfailingly to increasing wealth. But increasing wealth brought in its train spiritual peril. "As riches increase, so will pride, anger and love of the world in all its branches." Wesley's solution to this grave threat that as Methodists increased in social respectability they would decline in religious fervor he put trenchantly in a paragraph in *Thoughts Upon Methodism*:

Is there no way to prevent this? This continual declension of pure religion? We ought not to forbid people to be diligent and frugal. We must exhort all Christians to gain all they can and to save all they can; that is, in effect grow rich. What way then (I ask again) can we take, that our money may not sink us to the nethermost hell? There is one way, and there is no other under heaven. If those who "gain all they can" and "save all they can" will likewise "give all they can," then the more they gain, the more they will grow in grace and the more treasure they will lay up in heaven.³

³ Quoted in George Croft Cell, *The Rediscovery of John Wesley*, p. 380.

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His idea was simple enough: Make all you honestly can, but hoard nothing, do not accumulate property. Extract the poison from riches by giving them away. "I do not say, Be a good Jew, giving a tenth of all you possess. I do not say, Be a good Pharisee, giving a fifth of your substance. I dare not advise you to give half of what you have, no, nor three-quarters, *but all!*"⁴ At least he lived up to his own injunction.

Once again we may be faced with a standard of our founder which is "too great for our small hearts." But we ought not to be ashamed of the tradition, and now that we have grown rich we may well assess the danger that the Church may lose its soul upon the possession of unconsecrated wealth. I dare to say that unless a larger measure of stewardship can be made effective within our ranks God can never use us for his program of world redemption. The haphazard and paltry giving of the average Methodist is an evidence of the anchorage which we have in the world and our selfish apathy to the heart-breaking task of making Christ known, worshiped, and obeyed around the earth. Money is merely a trust, a part of God's kinetic energy committed to us to be used in a partnership enterprise with him in making the

⁴ Sermon 126.

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world Christian. To hoard it, to squander it, to spend it on self-indulgence and personal gratification is to betray the trust and to be unworthy of a stewardship committed to us by the great Giver of life.

There is another discipline to which our historic tradition invites consideration. Do we give God the rightful proportion of our personal energy? Call it time if you wish, or interest, or the projection of our will upon life. Life to Jesus was a conscious dwelling within the will of God. Everything had a divine connotation for him. He lived and moved and had his being in the Father's will. Our fathers had something of this same infatuation with the divine. They sang:

Religion is the chief concern
Of mortals here below.

This characteristic we find in almost every powerful Christian personality that has profoundly affected the world—Augustine, Francis of Assisi, Father Lawrence, Luther, Wesley, Whitefield, Livingstone, men who have lived in God, drinking daily of his life until in them there came to be springs of water welling up unto eternal life. If you will examine these lives you will find that the discipline of every human faculty to the end of greater spiritual power marked each of them. We continually try to gain spirituality with-

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out sacrifice, to achieve chastened and purified hearts and avoid the fire. We will not crucify the flesh in order to give the spirit a chance. We sing blithely of the old rugged cross upon a green hill far away but we wear a smooth gold crucifix around our necks and inwardly resent the idea that the green hill is in reality "the place of a skull."

The Bible is crowded on every page with the truth we rebel against. There is no other road to power save that which lies along the highway of self-discipline, of making oneself do the right thing simply because it is right, of achieving the rhythm of a life habitually dedicated to seeking, knowing, and doing the will of God as it is made known to us in Jesus Christ. All our pathways to power lead by the cross.

Here we are in a world gone berserk. Its madness and folly is the outflow of its unregulated freedom. Its material powers have outdistanced its moral restraints. It cannot control the energies it has created. It turns upon itself and destroys itself in a cataclysm of greed and jealousy. It is a sorry spectacle of the "wisdom of this world" which God calls folly. When shall we learn the disciplines of national unselfishness and seek the dividends of good will? America stands today, with her measureless wealth, in the hour of her destiny. If we know nothing but the wild furor

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of clashing arms; if we have not those moral reserves which make it unnecessary to draw the sword; if we cannot so discipline ourselves in liberty that we do not deny it to any citizen of our own land, regardless of color or economic status; if we are moral adolescents in a world of demonic power, we must not expect to escape the holocaust to which our undisciplined moral life hurries us, together with all the other nations that forget God.

There is room in our land and in our world for a Church that has faith in the wisdom of doing right. The hour and the occasion meet to challenge again the people called Methodists to forsake the easy pathways of the world, to mortify their fleshly pride and set the feet of this generation once more on that narrow road that leads to life.

VII

The Everlasting Gospel in Our Day

IT WILL BE WELL IN THIS CONCLUDING CHAPTER TO lift up for our attention some of those elements in the gospel of early Methodism which explain her amazing influence and which, while often overlooked, are still the secret of her indispensable message to this generation. For Wesley was not a novelty seeker in the realm of doctrine, nor was he essentially a controversialist. He was a practical reformer. He went out to preach persuaded that there was in the gospel the power of God unto salvation to everyone that believed and that he was commissioned to present to men the eternal choice between life and death. What happened under his preaching is a matter of history. "His preaching brought every man alike to his knees in the dust and ashes of repentance." No, not every man. For some, in prideful arrogance, referred to the Methodists as a "new sect of enthusiastical seducers." It may not be amiss to flash on these pages a picture of John Wesley as a young preacher. The scene is St. Mary's, Oxford, and Charles is describing the occasion:

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At ten I walked with my brother and Mr. Piers and Meriton (two clergymen who had just taken part in Wesley's first conference in London) to St. Mary's where my brother bore his testimony before a crowded audience, much increased by the racers (it was race-week in Oxford). Never have I seen a more attentive audience. They did not let a word slip them. Some of the Heads stood up the whole time, and fixed their eyes on him. If they can endure sound doctrine like his, he will surely leave a blessing behind him. . . . We walked back in form, the little band of us four, for of the rest durst none join himself to us.

More and more scenes like this were to take place all over England. The Methodists became a sensation. Scorn and criticism gave way to opposition and mob violence. But the common people heard the Methodist preachers gladly, and as door after door was shut in their faces by an irate ecclesiasticism the doors of men's hearts were opened and salvation came into many a home.

What were these men saying that so profoundly stirred their generation? What emphases were they lifting up with passionate insistence that the hardened hearts of men were thus softened and their wayward wills captured for the Kingdom of Christ? There must have been some basic correspondence between

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the fundamental truths they preached and the needs of those who heard. It must have been indeed the bread of life to hungry souls, else it could not so profoundly have stirred the multitude and set in motion so transforming a revival of true religion. There is doubtless some exaggeration in the tradition that Wesley preached to twenty thousand people at one time. But we do know that great multitudes did stand for long periods of time listening to this little preacher whose eye had almost hypnotic power and whose voice was penetrating and of such range and pitch that it carried to the extremities of even the largest crowd. Oftentimes the listeners assembled at five o'clock in the morning to hear his message. It is impossible to escape the conclusion, after all due allowance has been made for the times in which he lived, that John Wesley did bring a gospel that was good news to the hearts of weary men and that there was something in his words and spirit that answered gloriously to a hunger of the human soul. It is scantily proper for us who often bemoan our small congregations to discount the crowds that heard Wesley and Whitefield. Most of us would cordially welcome their audiences if we knew the secret of drawing them.

There is a continuing stream of truth in the gospel. A sense there is, to be sure, in which our gospel is so

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adaptable that it speaks the language of each generation. There is also an ageless and unchanging quality about it that, like its Lord, is the same "yesterday, today, and forever." To discover these essential and enduring elements in the eternal Word and proclaim them with fidelity of interpretation and centrality of emphasis is rightly to divide the word of truth and prove ourselves ministers that need not in any generation to be ashamed. I propose now to lift up certain of these major doctrinal beliefs around which the early Methodists built their messages and examine them in the light of their abiding significance for the sons of Wesley in the Christian movement of today.

First, let us look at Wesley's doctrine of God and Christ. To him God was the Reality behind all realities. In one of his sermons on the Sermon on the Mount he records his belief "that God is in all things—that we should use and look upon nothing as separate from God—who pervades and actuates the whole created frame, and is, in a true sense, the soul of the universe." Wesley was not predominantly a theologian and we can hardly expect from him an ordered and systematic theology. At times he seems to emphasize the distance between God, the Sovereign Other, and his world. Again he is insisting that however boundless are the chasms of time, distance, and

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personality that separate God from man, we must not think of God as aloof and indifferent but intimate and near, at once above but also graciously close to his creation. Here was no mechanistic or deistic idea of God but the conception of one whose love brings him into the world of nature around and into the heart of the believer who reaches out to find him. Both transcendence and immanence are here not philosophically differentiated but practically operative in a world that is filled with all the fullness of God.

It is an interesting fact that John Wesley preached no recorded sermon on the person of Christ. His printed sermons reveal no single one built around the person of Jesus Christ. Innumerable references there are to the work of Christ in redemption, but any attempt to develop or set forth an ordered Christology is significantly missing. The explanation of this must not be sought in any depreciatory attitude toward the Son of God but rather in Wesley's almost unconscious theological presuppositions. There is a naïve acceptance of the centrality of Christ's position in the plan of salvation which is in itself a final proof of the determinative and generative place which he held in Wesley's mind and heart as the source of redemptive power. Wesley was so sure of God that he never undertook to prove his existence. He was so radiantly

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certain of Christ's redeeming love, cleansing, sustaining and motivating his own life, that to rest this blessed spiritual reality upon any theory of Christ's person seemed to him superfluous and almost disloyal. His main concern was with the work of Christ, its atoning and redemptive efficacy, its universal purpose. He would dwell insistently upon the benefits that accrued to the believer when he accepted Christ, and felt his sins forgiven and entered into the experience of faith and love. The true divinity of our Lord was essential to all this, and was accepted on the basis of its New Testament presentation and its final authentication in reborn and re-empowered lives. If someone had asked Wesley to prove the deity of Jesus Christ I think he would probably have pointed to some humble convert, to some little band of men and women whose sins were forgiven and in whose faces shone that light which was reflected from the face of Christ. These were Wesley's final credentials, these the supreme evidence that the Cause must be greater than the result it produces, these his epistles known and read of all men. Here is a pragmatism that transcends philosophy and here is an experience, born of God, that puts to shame the too confident syllogistic arguments of the theologian. When a man has been delivered from death unto life he knows that his De-

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liverer is greater than the sin which overpowered his human nature, and he is driven to cry out in gratitude, "Thanks be unto God, who giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ."

Methodism needs today this practical, operative certainty of God. We need to take some things for granted, and among them are the authenticity of Jesus' own declarations concerning himself, the incontrovertible fact of Paul's conversion, the miracle of the first three centuries of the Christian era, the ever-recurrent "triumphs of God" that are taking place in every decade and in every land of our present world. We must not lose out of our American Christianity the element of expectancy, the feeling that God may break through at any moment with healing in his wings, that the miracle of regeneration is not to be the rare and spectacular result of an occasional revival sermon, but the normal accompaniment of the effective presentation of the love of Christ for lost men. No experience could be more reassuring to Methodism than to make a pilgrimage to her mission fields. There she would behold a modern Acts of the Apostles taking place before her eyes. Just as Philippi and Ephesus felt the touch of God long ago, so today do Chungking and Leopoldville. The missionaries are so busy presenting Christ to men and wit-

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nessing their salvation by faith in him that, like Wesley, they have but little time to argue or theologize. They are captivated by the evident manifestation of His saving grace, and the plan of salvation is not a grand theory but an everyday functioning and proven reality. God lives, Jesus saves, the Holy Spirit keeps—and that is enough. The mighty works of God take place before the eyes of all men.

I am not arguing for intellectual obscurantism or seeking to discredit the scholar and the theologian. I am pleading for a vivid, experimental knowledge of God, for a rebirth of confidence in the saving efficacy of Jesus' life and death and the unquestioning proclamation that the Lamb of God taketh away the sin of the world, and that whosoever will may come. If this be fundamentalism let us embrace it, for no Savior around whom there is a question mark can save a generation as desperate as this, and no gospel is adequate which does not hold out before men the inescapable alternatives between life and death, heaven and hell that are written in the unrepealed moral constitution of the universe. Our generation hungers for God, and no fictitious half-gods will meet its wistful and pathetic cry for redemption.

Another of early Methodism's insistencies merits our reverent and humbled attention, her proclamation of

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the fact and the necessity of conversion. The early Methodists believed that a man could be born again, that he could be "saved," that his nature could be regenerated by the work of the Holy Spirit, and that in every desire and purpose he became a "new man in Christ Jesus." That which concerned Wesley supremely was salvation, and salvation meant to him the happy state of the man who is the recipient of the saving grace of God. He tells us clearly what he understands salvation to mean.

We mean [he wrote] that the moment a man receives faith he is saved from doubt and fear, and sorrow of heart, by a peace that passes all understanding; from the heaviness of a wounded spirit, by joy unspeakable; from his sins, of whatsoever kind they are, from his vicious desires, as well as words and actions. . . . By salvation I mean, not barely, according to the vulgar notion, deliverance from hell, or going to heaven; but a present deliverance from sin, a restoration of the soul to its primitive health, its original purity; a recovery of the divine nature; the renewal of our souls after the image of God, in righteousness and true holiness, in justice, mercy and truth.¹

This classic and luminous statement by the founder of Methodism carries us to the heart of the spiritual motivation that created the Wesleyan movement and

¹ *Works*, VIII, 10, 47.

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gave it a distinctive place in the eighteenth century. They were out to change the moral natures of men, to conquer sin and enthrone righteousness in the heart, to give to the world twice-born men, whose second birth was from above. Had Methodism not been able to mediate this miracle to sinful men it would long since have been forgotten. And it will be forgotten when it no longer preaches this redemptive ministry to each succeeding generation.

There are certain characteristics of early Methodism's conversion experiences that we must frankly examine. In the first place, most of them were instantaneous. Wesley so states during the earlier days of his ministry. He contends that "after careful inquiry" in the London church he found no exception to the rule that deliverance from sin was instantaneous and the change was "wrought in a moment." Of these startling and spectacular deliverances from sin there can be no doubt, nor is the experience confined to that earlier day. It takes place in similar fashion in our day, as it has in every day since Christ was offered to men. In these instances modern psychology would contribute to the explanation the unconscious process of preparation that goes on before every crisis of conversion. Such is evident in nearly all the cases where full information as to the history of the

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convert is available. Hidden in the unconscious self there have been unforgettable memories of sacrificial love, wistful burnings of heart which come to the point of incandescence under the Spirit-filled pleading of some man of God.

Later in life Wesley is less dogmatic about the suddenness of conversion. In 1785 he writes to a correspondent:

There is an irreconcilable variability in the operations of the Holy Spirit on the souls of men, more especially as to the manner of justification. Many find Him rushing upon them like a torrent, while they experience the "o'erwhelming power of saving grace." This has been the experience of many but in others He works in a very different way:

He designs His influence to infuse,
Sweet, refreshing, as the silent dews.

It pleases Him to work the latter way in you from the beginning; and it is not impossible He will continue to work in a gentle and almost insensible manner.

Methodism may thus historically still believe in instantaneous conversions, but we can also be very sure that the quietly unfolding, progressive work of the Holy Spirit is also authentic as a mark of early Methodism. Both methods have validity in Scripture and in history and in experience.

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Again, these early conversions were both emotional and ethical. They have been disparagingly classified as almost entirely the result of release from nervous tension, the psychic deliverance of unstable natures from inhibitions and complexes. They have been explained as psychic reactions arising from primitive pioneer environments in which fear conditioned the minds of men and they were impelled to seek security in the world to come when they could not find it in the world around them. Some have claimed that such conversions are common only among those evangelical Protestant denominations "which have cultivated an elaborate technique to produce them." But the significance of conversion for psychology depends upon its universality, and William James goes to the heart of the matter when he asks, "Is there under all the discrepancies of the creeds a common nucleus to which they bear their testimony unanimously?" He answers immediately in the affirmative. The typical Methodist conversion belongs not to abnormal psychology but exhibits "a certain uniform deliverance in which religions all appear to meet." That it has emotional accompaniments is not to be wondered at but to be expected. How could so radical a release from sin, so ineffable an experience of grace, so sweet and satisfying a sense of reconciliation sweep over the

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chords of a human life without setting them to vibrating with heavenly joy? We should be less than human were it not so. If there is "joy in heaven over one sinner that repenteth" why should we not expect music in the soul of him whose sin has been forgiven and whose title to Sonship has been sealed by the blood of the Lamb?

But the typical Methodist conversion experience was a blending of the emotional and the ethical. Sydney G. Dimond has examined in detail one hundred and thirty-two cases recited in the first five volumes of *Wesley's Journal*. Out of the total number the emotional experience is emphasized in 89.4 per cent of the cases and 92.4 per cent have a distinct ethical significance. It was a life-changing process the Methodists believed in and preached. Men quit their meanness, drunkards abandoned the pub, thieves made restitution, hot tempers were cooled, slanderers repented, and impure men and women had their thoughts cleansed by the streams of mercy and forgiveness.

The possibility of conversion, of regeneration, is the keystone in the arch of Methodist doctrine. Uncertainty regarding the salvability of human nature throws an atmosphere of sterility over all our preaching. We are life changers by the grace of God, and

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may we heed well the words of the late Dr. Cadman, who never felt so much at home anywhere as in Methodism: "Carry to the close of your ministry, untarnished and unimpaired, the sense of your access to immediate plenary grace, in order that you may proclaim it to every seeker after God. A distinction far too sharp to be beneficial has been drawn between a ministry that is educational and one that is evangelistic."² At our best we are ambassadors of God, pleaders for reconciliation, ministers of the mystery of grace, and mediators of a redemption in his Name that is above every name. One of India's great leaders said of Methodism's foremost missionary apostle: "We always know where Stanley Jones is coming out. If he begins at the binomial theorem he will come out at the place of conversion." To which incisive indictment Dr. Jones pleads guilty, and says, "I make no apologies, for life comes out at that place. Amid all the changes which have taken place in the mind and spirit of this age there is one underlying need that has not changed—men need conversion. They need God to give basis for personal living, for social change, for morality, and for a meaning to the universe. And if the Christian movement cannot produce this miracle of the changed life then psychiatry will have to

² *Ambassadors of God*, p. 220.

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attempt it.”³ If men must be born again, the second birth is the business of the church and not of the clinic; it is the high responsibility of the minister of God rather than of the doctor of medicine.

Methodism, in the third place, preached a doctrine of salvation by grace. John Wesley was of the opinion that man's nature was corrupted by the fall of Adam and that it remained in helplessness and spiritual loss until it was touched by the prevenient grace of God. It was only this gracious movement of the Holy Spirit that even disposed the sinner to seek the Lord. The initiative was with God and not with man. “Before thou hast prayed, I have answered.” As a more modern mystic has expressed it: “For thirty years I searched for God, and when at the end of this time my eyes were opened, I discovered that it was He who had searched for me.” Man is saved by the free grace of God and by the unmerited sacrifice and atonement of his Son, Jesus Christ. Man cannot of his own strength acquire faith. It must be sought and received as “the gift of God.” Nothing that we do or leave undone can be the originating cause of our salvation. The initial impulse rests in the wooing heart of the Eternal. In the words of Baron Von Hügel, “The passion and hunger for God comes from

³ *The Christian Century*, January 4, 1939.

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God and God answers it with Christ.”⁴ This would seem to have led close to Calvinism. Wesley himself admits that “the true Gospel touches the very edge of Calvinism.” But he sharply parted company with John Calvin, and it was historically the Armenian emphasis of Methodism that “made an end of Calvinism, for all practical purposes, and therefore laid a malign ghost that had haunted theology ever since the fourth century.”⁵ Man’s free will remains unimpaired and cannot be overwhelmed by an eternal, unchangeable, irresistible decree of God.

Thou canst not mock the sons of men;
Invite us to draw nigh,
Offer Thy grace to all, and then
Thy grace to most deny.

Man cannot save himself except as he is aided by “the power that worketh in us,” inducing repentance and faith, but it is equally true that no Sovereign God can retain his ethical character and reject the seeking and penitent soul and consign him to hell in conformity with some predestined and discriminative judgment that roots itself in omnipotent authority rather than in compassionate love.

⁴ Greene, *Letters from Baron Von Hügel to a Niece*, XXXI.

⁵ Bett, *The Spirit of Methodism*, p. 147.

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We are today more in danger of losing our early emphasis upon grace not because we are reverting to Calvinism but because we are sinking into legalism. The legalistic spirit is forever intruding into our modern conception of religion. We have so exalted man's self-sufficiency in the material world that it is but a short step to affirm the same independent self-confidence in the realm of the spiritual. This modern attitude, that is based on man's ability to fight his own battles, to achieve decency and respectability by his own efforts, to battle down the world, the flesh, and the devil in his own strength, carries us to the heart of the problem that confronts the spiritual experience of every soul in our generation. It is the question of power. "Who shall deliver me?" cries the stricken soul. A good deal of modern religion, even when bearing the Christian name, comes perilously near to the helpless legalism of Paul's pre-Christian days. That was the very crux of the soul struggle of Saul of Tarsus. The law was powerless to save. The flesh was too weak. The will was too unsteady. And then there came to him the Christian revelation, a discovery so surprisingly wonderful and joyous that for all the rest of his days he went about telling men his secret, the glorious good news of God. And it was this: that at the flaming heart and center of the Christian

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faith there lay precisely what he needed most, the one thing for the lack of which humanity was perishing—power, supernatural and divine. “I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God.” No man can save himself; salvation is from the Lord. No one of us can bargain with God. “No man can ever have God in his debt: God has every man immeasurably in his.” It is too much the disposition of our generation to depend upon works, sometimes faithfully and rigorously performed, to give us standing with the Eternal. We catch up the words in Browning’s “Johannes Agricola”:

Make out, and reckon on, His ways,
And bargain for His love, and Hand,
Paying a price, at His right hand.

We would be much nearer the road that leads to life if, “in our hands no price we bring,” but only kneel in reverent humility at his cross and cry out with Horatius Bonar:

Thy love to me, O God,
Not mine, O Lord, to thee,
Can rid me of this dark unrest,
And set my spirit free.

The joyous sense of assurance was another of early Methodism’s emphases. The Spirit of God bore wit-

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ness with the spirit of these early believers that they were the children of God. This was the expected privilege of every Christian. Joy like a river flowed through the lives of humble men and women throughout England. This experience of God in their hearts was, as Wesley expressed it, "the strongest evidence of the truth of Christianity." Wesley's father used to say to him, "The inward witness, Son, the inward witness, that is the proof, the strongest proof of Christianity." He gives us in his own words a clear-cut definition of this Methodist doctrine of assurance: "By the testimony of the Spirit, I mean an inward impression on the soul whereby the Spirit of God immediately and directly witnesses to my spirit that I am a Child of God; that Jesus Christ hath loved me and given himself for me; that all my sins are blotted out and I, even I, am reconciled to God." These eighteenth-century Methodists knew whom they had believed. Here is a typical testimony from a mother in Israel who described to Wesley her experiences in Christ: "I had the witness in myself that He had made an end of sin and taken my whole heart forever. And from that moment I have never lost the witness nor felt anything in my heart but pure love." Here were plain English peasants who had an unshakable certainty of one thing, namely, their standing with God.

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They might be ignorant of many things, but one thing they knew, namely, that God for Christ's sake had forgiven their sins and that his Spirit was bearing witness daily to the unclouded fellowship with Christ which they enjoyed. We cannot but think of St. Paul again. He knew this fellowship divine. To him Christ was an everliving Presence in whom life found its meaning and in whose will there was peace. There is an element of mysticism here that lies too deep for our understanding, but this fellowship with God, this radiant certainty of his pardoning grace and sustaining love, have been the comfort and the strength of true believers in every generation. The gospel offers every man this certitude. There may be "sunshine in my soul today" if only I will dwell in this light. To be in Christ is to have Christ in you. Religion is not something that you bear as a burden; it is something that carries you along with wings. It is "release and liberty, life with an endless song at its heart. It means feeling within you, as long as life here lasts, the carrying power of Love Almighty; and underneath you, when you come to die, the touch of everlasting arms." ⁶

Methodism needs desperately this sense of religious assurance. We are all aware of something lacking in

⁶ Stewart, *A Man in Christ*, pp. 169 f.

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our religious life. Many people hang on to the Church when they have lost all the joy out of their faith. Religion is a routine, a road of duty, unenlightened by any vision of His face or any sense of His companionship. There are too many strained faces and weary, worried hearts among us. Too many people are beaten down by life, conquered when they should be conquerors. They have lost their childlike confidence in a defending omnipotence. They struggle against odds too great for their human strength. They need to hear Isaiah say again: "In returning and rest shall ye be saved; in quietness and confidence shall be your strength."

The responsibility for this absence of assurance must in part be laid at the door through which many of them entered the Christian life. They knew no transforming renewal of their hearts and wills. They held up their hands or signed a card or answered church vows to whose deeper meaning they were strangers. Thus they were ushered into the full fellowship of the redeemed, only to find themselves babes in Christ wandering around in the wastelands of a church which was more interested in raising its budget and feeding its various committees than it was in tending the tempted and lost souls whose names are

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actually on its rolls. This can be no better said than by Dr. Sangster:

When every allowance has justly been made for the various forces which have told against the faith of recent years, nothing is more certain than this—that our chief weakness has been *within* the camp; there has been a definite diminution of vital and personal religion; sin has had victory over us; many of us have been in the grip of moods and passions, with no more power against them than the people who do not know Christ—irritability, jealousy, crude ambition, ungenerous judgments, idle criticisms, unholy thoughts. We have largely lost our fathers' faith in heaven, and their fine scorn of death; both the hurry and the worry of the world have invaded our souls, and we have lost the peace and poise that belong to those who belong to God; the gay exuberance of primitive Christianity does not shine from us. Small wonder that we cannot give this glad secret away. We have so little to give.⁷

Among the questions still asked of young ministers entering the Methodist itinerancy are three which, if taken seriously, are calculated to confuse and perhaps embarrass the applicant:

Are you going on to perfection?

Do you expect to be made perfect in love in this life?

⁷ *Methodism Can Be Born Again*, p. 28. By permission of Abingdon-Cokesbury Press.

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Are you earnestly striving after it?

They come down to us from a distant day. We should hardly include them if we were originating a set of questions for our present times. And yet they are a reflection of one of the most conspicuous doctrines and emphases of Methodism. John Wesley believed in personal holiness and the sanctification of the believer. He believed that such holiness was, like conversion, a work of grace but was wrought only after agonizing striving on the part of the believer. Sanctification was not necessarily sinlessness. The sanctified man could make mistakes, both in opinion and practice, but these were errors which, while transgressions of the perfect law, were not voluntary transgressions and were not inconsistent with loving God with all the heart.

We do not need here to review all the debates that have waged over John Wesley's doctrine and experience of holiness. Surely few men labored in so bright a blaze of publicity, often hostile, as did Wesley. As the years go by the tributes to the singularity of his character and the guileless clarity of his motive and purpose grow more and more unreserved. Whether he confessed it or not, Wesley demonstrated over and over the marks of a holy man in whom, to use his own

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words, "every thought and word and work springs from and is conducted to the end by the pure love of God and our neighbors." This state of perfection was to be gradually attained by the believer, who, eagerly pressing forward in the Christian life, grew in grace from day to day. There might come a climacteric blessing that marked a definite attainment, but it was ever the goal of perfect love that drew on the believer's heart. Thus Wesley's doctrine kept open a vista of sanctified experience for every Christian. He had set his feet on a way that led to holiness, and "groaning for full redemption," to use a quaint Methodist phrase, became the normal experience of every regenerated member of a Methodist society. This refusal to admit the necessity of falling from grace, of putting the emphasis upon perseverance in righteousness rather than probable spiritual defeat, is an aspect of early Methodist doctrine we have not emphasized. We have somewhat facilely and superficially talked about "a Methodist's privilege of falling from grace." That is a modern defense theology that did not come from our Methodist founding fathers. They believed rather that we were called unto holiness, kept by grace, that we "might be presented blameless in the day of judgment." Out of their hearts they sang:

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O that with all Thy saints I might
By sweet experience prove
What is the length and breadth and height
And depth of perfect love.

The tragedy of our modern Christianity is that it has largely lost this passion for holiness. We do not have it in our ministry. We want and expect our preachers to be good men, but that they should be outstanding examples of men who are groaning after holiness and confidently expecting to be made perfect in love in this life is too much. The average congregation would take its chances on "a good mixer" rather than a saintly mystic. We have standardized mediocrity in the Christian life rather than holiness and sanctification. Most people's religious experience arrives at a kind of dead center somewhere between the prodigal son and the sanctified believer, and to this fixed ground their unadventurous spirits cling. They will not dwell with the swineherd but they covet not the rarified fellowships of sainthood. "I like you," says the doting member of our congregation, "because you are so human." Alas, too often the would-be compliment should leave us wondering, if not humiliated.

This doctrine of sanctification is not preached to-

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day. It has almost been lost to the evangelical pulpit and hence is passing in the attention of Christian believers. One wonders if it has not been done to its death in the house of its friends. The theologians have quibbled and debated so much over the details of the doctrine that they have about robbed the central truth that is at its heart of any pertinence or beauty for the average man. But we cannot overlook the preciousness and the centrality of this idea of holiness in Wesley's mind. "In the hour when he was least satisfied with his exposition, he was most positive about his experience." Methodism grew where the doctrine was preached and languished where it was ignored. In ridding ourselves of this Methodistic emphasis we are embarrassed by the New Testament. The high ideal of perfection, "even as your Father in heaven is perfect," rises to disturb us when we too easily settle down in comfortable complacency. The fact is the world needs a more absolute type of Christianity. The lukewarm mediumness that characterizes much of our church life simply does not possess the power of spiritual transformation which characterized New Testament Christianity. We founder today in the midst of a tragic world because there are reservations in our commitment to Christ and we dare not break our footholds in the world and launch out

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with him into a redemptive enterprise that can be won only at the cost of a cross. The secret of Christianity is in its plus mark. If it goes along with the world and quits where the world quits, it has the reward of the world. But if it goes the second mile, pressing into the higher altitudes of character and service, then come its vision and its power and its vitalizing fellowship with the Christ of the Mount. Modern Methodism has sense enough, has spiritual insight sufficient to rescue this New Testament doctrine of holiness from the hands of its cynical despoilers and set it forth once more as the precious experience of humble saints who love the Lord with all their minds and hearts. We need a new and modern interpretation and proclamation of the redeemability of these human natures of ours from all sin, and the possibility of attainment, through His grace and sustaining strength, of Christian perfection. The cynicism that scorns the doctrine tragically reveals the desperate need of the truth it so casually rejects. Our Christianity today suffers from an inferiority complex which is born of the flesh and not of the Spirit of God.

As Methodism faces this tragic hour she may well look back to the fountain sources of her ancient strength. The Methodist revival under the Wesleys

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was a demonstration of the power of God in a dark and sinful era. We do not need to imitate Wesley's methods, message, or techniques. We should be foolish to think they would be as effective, in their original patterns, as they were in those early days. What we need to do is to discover again the great spiritual concepts and motives which created those patterns of doctrine and of organization. To clothe them in the consonant and congenial garb of a modern world need in no sense rob them of their significance and power. We are the children of a great tradition, and fidelity to the spirit of that inheritance will enable God to use us mightily for his glory in the days that confront us.

The sum and substance of it all goes back to a Revelation. God was in Christ reconciling the world unto himself. This Fact of history, of revelation, of redemption lies underneath the ground of truth upon which we stand and preach. If Christ was not God, and God was not in Jesus, then history becomes a jumbled mass of futile contradictions. There is no foundation for the life that now is or hope for the life that is to come. Our confidence in the possibility of a brave new world withers and the last flickering light dies out on the rim of our perishing dreams. It is midnight and there will be no morning.

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But the God who so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son does live. Jesus Christ was born of Mary, and the Word did become flesh and dwell among us. He did forgive the sins of the whole world and in his death upon the cross become the propitiation for our guilt and shame. He did conquer death and become the everliving Lord of time and eternity. He does live in his Church, and no machination of men or diabolism of hell can prevail against it. To us has been committed the mystery of this everlasting gospel. We do not judge it. It judges us, and by the measure of our faithfulness will the answer be as to whether God will have a place for Methodism in the future that is comparable to that which he entrusted to her in the past.

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